DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 413 496 CE 075 151

AUTHOR	Medel-Anonuevo, Carolyn, Ed.
TITLE	Women, Education and Empowerment: Pathways towards Autonomy. UIE Studies 5.
INSTITUTION	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, Hamburg (Germany). Inst. for Education.
ISBN	ISBN-92-820-1013-9
PUB DATE	1995-00-00
NOTE	69p.; Report of the International Seminar on Women's Education and Empowerment (Hamburg, Germany, January 27-February 2, 1993).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Proceedings (021) -- Reports - General (140)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Developing Nations; Education Work Relationship; Educational Needs; *Educational Practices; Educational Theories; *Empowerment; Financial Support; Foreign Countries; International Educational Exchange; *Literacy Education; *Personal Autonomy; Popular Education; Role of Education; Seminars; Theory Practice Relationship; *Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS	Asia; Colombia; Organization of American States

ABSTRACT

This document contains seven papers about and from the International Seminar on Women's Education and Empowerment, which was convened to give women educators and researchers from diverse sociocultural backgrounds an opportunity to examine collectively different education practices and their theoretical implications for empowering women. The following papers are included: "Preface" (Carolyn Medel-Anonuevo); "The International Seminar on Women's Education and Empowerment" (Carolyn Medel-Anonuevo, Bettina Bochynek); "The Theoretical and Practical Bases for Empowerment" (Nelly P. Stromquist); "Some Reflections on the Empowerment of Women" (Lucita Lazo); "Women's Literacy and Empowerment: The Nellore Experience" (Anita Dighe); "The Organization of American States Multinational Project on Education and Work: An Experience of Popular Education for Women's Empowerment in Colombia" (Miryan Zuniga E.); "Educate to Empower: An Asian Experience" (Namtip Aksornkool); and "Thinking about Women and Literacy: Support and Challenge" (Jenny Horsman). A list of seminar participants is also included. Several papers contain bibliographies. (MN)

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ED 413 496

WOMEN, EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT:

Pathways towards Autonomy

edited by Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo

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Women, Education and Empowerment:

Pathways towards Autonomy

edited by Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo

Report of the International Seminar held at UIE, Hamburg, 27 January - 2 February 1993

With contributions from:

Namtip Aksornkool ♦ Anita Dighe ♦ Jenny Horsmann ♦ Lucita Lazo ♦ Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo and Bettina Bochynek ♦ Nelly P. Stromquist ♦ Miryan Zuñiga

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Cover photograph: UNESCO/Hunnar Publicity

© UNESCO Institute for Education 1995
Feldbrunnenstraße 58
P.O. Box 13 10 23
20110 Hamburg, Germany

ISBN 92 820 1013 9

Printed by
Robert Seemann ♦ Neumann-Reichard-Str. 27-33
Haus 8, I Stock
22041 Hamburg, Germany ♦ Tel 040/656-0003

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PREFACE

As women's education has become one of the key development objectives in the nineties, it is crucial to examine the assumptions under which policies, programmes and projects are formulated towards this goal. More recently, the concept of empowerment has been tied to the range of activities undertaken by and for women in different areas, education included. In all these, a related question is: From what and whose perspective are we going to evaluate such assumptions and its empowering outcomes?

The International Seminar on Women's Education and Empowerment was convened by the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE) together with the Principal Regional Office for Asia and Pacific (PROAP) precisely to look into these issues by gathering women educators and researchers from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds to collectively examine the different education practices and their theoretical implications for empowering women.

At several instances during the seminar, it was evident that there were similarities in the conditions of women's education in the different parts of the world, e.g. stereotyping in the formal education system which further reinforces the traditional gender roles. On the other hand, it was also pointed out that one should not gloss over the differences of the conditions of women as a result of specific economic, political or socio-cultural factors.

As the participants summed up the similarities and differences, it was clear in our discussions that it is critical that the women's perspective be taken as the reference point for evaluating the effectiveness of educational policies, programmes and projects.
As such a women's perspective is continuously evolving, it is imperative that this be clarified at certain points so that the different agents involved are able to examine and assess their activities as well as contribute to the further refining of such a framework through the analyses of different practices.

We hope that with the publication of the report, which includes many of the papers presented during the seminar, UIE is able to contribute to the dissemination of the diversity of ideas on women's education as well as providing a venue for critical reflection on empowerment. In compiling the papers for this publication, we have tried to strike a balance between theoretical and practical discussions as well as to combine the programme perspective with more personal reflections.

For all the spirited and enriching discussions, we would like to thank all the participants at the seminar. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the contribution of Cendrine Sebastiani of the Publications Section of UIE for painstakingly correcting the drafts as well as experimenting on different layout possibilities for this publication.

Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo

THE INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo and Bettina Bochynek

Introduction

Since the "UN Declaration of the Decade of Women" in 1975, attention and action on women's concerns have steadily increased and education, whether it be the form of consciousness-raising or skills acquisition, was one of the areas women's organizations, government agencies and international donor agencies focused on. The underlying assumption was that if women understood their conditions, knew their rights and learned skills traditionally denied to them, empowerment would follow. Eighteen years have passed and there are different views as to whether such assumptions about increasing access to education and training have resulted in the tilting of the power balance in favor of women.

The International Seminar on Women's Education and Empowerment therefore was convened amidst the discussion on the relevance of women's education in improving the situation of women, in the short term, and in emancipating women, in the long run. Furthermore, the Seminar took place during a crucial phase at the UNESCO Institute for Education, where women's non-formal education is going to be a key concern.

In view of the "World Conference on Women" to be held in Beijing in 1995, the seminar meant to be one of many actions and activities relevant to women's issues which will be initiated, organized and/or supported by the Institute. The promotion of action-oriented research and the improvement of cooperation with various institutions focusing on women's education needs will be one of the priorities of the Institute in the coming years. In fact, the partnership of UIE and the UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and Pacific (PROAP) in undertaking this seminar is an example of how continuing cooperation has been a crucial factor in the success of joint projects.

The key role of education must be underlined and investigated on a continuous basis. Despite the progress in this area, much remains to be done. The Seminar, as it progressed, was able to provide a sense of what different organizations were doing and how this could be improved. It was agreed that this could be a starting point for assessing the extent to which education has empowered women.

Objectives

The general objectives of the seminar were:

1. to exchange experiences in promoting the empowerment of women through different educational programmes, both formal and non-formal;
2. to discuss the theoretical issues arising from the practice of the education of women;
3. to develop research designs on women's education and empowerment for possible collaboration in selected areas; and
4. to explore ways and means of operationalizing the term "empowerment."

By the end of the seminar, the following outputs were expected:

- a definition of and a conceptual framework for understanding women's empowerment;
- an indicative list of indicators and processes or mechanisms of empowerment; and
- initial proposals/recommendations for future action, focusing on effective procedures and mechanisms of empowerment.

Participants

Given the diversity of work in women's education, researchers, educators and activists from different regions of the world were invited to take part in the Seminar. The objective was to bring these women together in a forum where they could discuss the whole range of activities they are involved in and cull important lessons not only for improving their work but also for assessing the impact of their programmes and/or projects.

To facilitate the exchange of experiences, the participants were each requested to prepare a background paper describing their education-related activities. It was further meant to stimulate the discussion on major problems in the field of women's education as well as to explore ways and means of carrying out efficient and innovative programmes for empowering women. The participants were likewise asked to reflect on the relevant theoretical issues and practical concerns regarding the empowerment of women through education.

To focus the discussions on theoretical and conceptual issues around empowerment, three participants were tasked with writing case studies which delved into the empirical and theoretical basis for empowerment.

A total of 16 participants from different regions in the world (Africa, Asia, Arab States, Caribbean, Europe, North America and South America) attended the Seminar. Some were university-based researchers and educators, others were working in women's organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with education, a few were working in UN agencies while one came from a government agency.

As a number of them were involved in the women's movement as well as peace movements, health, literacy and development work in their respective countries, the women brought in a variety of experiences.

Highlights of the Seminar

Given the objectives of the seminar, the six-day meeting was divided into three parts. The sharing of the participants' experiences was scheduled for the first two days while the reflection of the theoretical and conceptual implication of the term "empowerment" was to follow in the next two days. The remaining period was used for planning and coming up with concrete proposals.

To ensure maximum participation, the participants were divided into smaller groups in some parts of the programme. The main points of the group's discussion were then presented during the plenary sessions.

Context of Education Work

In terms of government policies on women's education, it was observed that while there is no explicit discrimination by gender in most places, neither is there a real commitment to provide sustainable programmes for women. There is such a perceived gap between the rhetoric and policies of decision-makers that many of the women considered the policies as simply paying "lip service" to women's concerns. Even in developed countries, the proportion of resources that is being allocated to women's needs is small considering the many diverse needs of the women. The fact that many of the decision-makers are men also constrains their appreciation of these needs.

The actual working and living conditions of women also prevent many of them from meaningful participation in women's education programmes/projects. The increasing impoverishment of women makes it necessary for them to focus on income-generating activities simultaneous with the performance of household chores. This, therefore limits their time and energy to get involved in education programmes.

Many of the women that have been projected to be beneficiaries of development programmes are illiterate, so the issue of literacy as a women's development concern is likewise a priority.

In spite of the above-mentioned problems, the participants agreed that, in order to promote women's empowerment, it is necessary to create an environment that will allow women to participate in educational programmes and share the

benefits. It was therefore emphasized that while there is a need to set up specific education programmes for women, there is also a necessity to develop forms of education that will sensitize people towards gender discrimination and will raise their acceptance of women's promotion.

The discussion on the relationship between the women's movement and the different areas (peace, health, literacy) of involvement of the participants likewise raised the important issue of how feminist concerns are integrated in these. While a few women related the problems of doing so, others shared their successful strategies in mainstreaming. It was observed that there is a tendency for some to look at women's only programmes as "marginalization" or "ghettoization" but there was consensus that such programmes have their specific contribution to improving the women's situation just as integrative programmes do.

This implies that the structures of society have to be taken into account. The approach to women's empowerment must be holistic in the sense that, apart from educational measures for women, other factors such as a) men being the decision-makers and b) the influence of popular culture and mass media must be taken into consideration.

The participants also compared notes as to how education programmes (whether they be women only or integrative) can empower. It was pointed out that one of the key determinants of successful programmes is the extent to which they had taken the multiple roles of women into account and how they helped in alleviating the burden.

Given these, among the suggested components are:

- promotion of gender awareness;
- lessons on health and nutrition;
- integration of technical, entrepreneurial, cultural and communal aspects;
- information and lessons on politics; and
- provision of planning and thinking skills.

It was also necessary to clarify the goals of women's education. The participants agreed that the more important objectives are:

- to eliminate illiteracy;
- to develop self-esteem and self-confidence;
- to have knowledge about their bodies and sexuality;
- to have the ability to make their own decisions and negotiate;
- to raise the women's awareness of their civil rights;
- to provide skills for income generation;
- to make participation in community/society more effective; and
- to prepare them to be good women leaders.

Crucial to education work are other complementary activities such as those in the areas of legal reform, transformation of international economic and political relations, action-oriented research and networking. It was stressed that it is equally important to convince men that better education of women will be beneficial to the entire family and the society as a whole.

The Concept of Empowerment

There was consensus among the participants that "empowerment" has become one of the most widely used development terms. Women's groups, non-governmental development organizations, activists, politicians, governments and international agencies refer to empowerment as one of their goals. Yet it is one of the least understood in terms of how it is to be measured or observed. It is precisely because this word has now been one of the fashionable concepts to include in policies/programmes/projects that there is a need to clarify and come up with tentative definitions. Furthermore, the particular implications of empowerment of women is an area that needs to be discussed.

1. Definition

The nature of empowerment renders it difficult to define. On the one hand, it is often referred to as a goal for many

development programmes/projects. On the other hand, it can also be conceived as a process that people undergo, which eventually leads to changes. Nelly Stromquist, for instance, defines empowerment as "a process to change the distribution of power both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society" while Lucy Lazo describes it as "a process of acquiring, providing, bestowing the resources and the means or enabling the access to a control over such means and resources".

Given the above, the term is therefore more relevant to the marginalized groups - the poor, the illiterates, the indigenous communities - and of course, cutting across these categories, the women.

From the discussion, it was also clear that empowerment can be observed at different levels. The above-mentioned definitions already point to interpersonal relations and institutions as possible sites of empowerment. Namtip Aksornkool looks at the individual level when she cites Paz's definition of empowerment as "the ability to direct and control one's own life". But it is clear from Ms. Aksornkool's presentation that such an individual empowerment of women is attained in relationship to the larger society. Citing Depthnews, she writes that "it is a process in which women gain control over their own lives by knowing and claiming their rights at all levels of society at the international, local, and household levels. Self-empowerment means that women gain autonomy, are able to set their own agenda and are fully involved in the economic, political and social decision-making process".

To add to the already complex nature of empowerment, it was also pointed out that it is difficult to come out with a general definition since it can be somehow determined by the respective cultural contexts. The relativity of empowerment, although in a different sense, is one of the important features discussed in Ms. Lazo's paper. She argues that "empowerment is a moving state; it is a continuum that varies in degree of power. It is relative... One can move from an extreme state of absolute lack of power to the other extreme of having absolute power".

As articulated in some of the papers, empowerment can have four components: cognitive, psychological, economic and political.

According to Ms. Stromquist, the cognitive component would include the "women's understanding of their conditions of subordination and the causes of such conditions at both micro and macro levels of society. It involves acquiring new knowledge to create a different understanding of gender relations as well as destroying old beliefs that structure powerful gender ideologies." The psychological component, on the other hand, would include the "development of feelings that women can act upon to improve their condition. This means formation of the belief that they can succeed in change efforts."

These two components are exemplified in Ms. Anita Dighe's presentation of the Nellore experience, where a literacy campaign contributed to the anti-drinking campaign. She writes that "women have picketed the arrack (local liquor), marched unitedly to the district collector's office and organized a "dharna" to ensure that auctions are not allowed to take place, they have become strengthened in their conviction that it is only such united action that can bring any change".

The economic component "requires that women be able to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of autonomy, no matter how small and hard to obtain at the beginning" (Stromquist). The case study of Ms. Lazo demonstrates how socio-economic aid (through granting of revolving funds, marketing assistance and product development) has helped in the setting up of micro-enterprises run by women. In contrast, Ms. Dighe's presentation stresses that while the cognitive and psychological components of empowerment are evident in the Nellore experience, the economic component might be more difficult to demonstrate as "income-generating activities, however, are difficult to implement because they are risky, time-consuming and hard to sustain".

The political component would encompass the "ability to organize and mobilize for change. Consequently, an empowerment process must involve not only

individual awareness but collective awareness and collective action. The notion of collective action is fundamental to the aim of attaining social transformation" (Stromquist).

It follows from the above components that empowerment allows women to have choices, which in turn means relative strength and bargaining power for them. While it is clear that women can be empowered individually, the feminist vision is one where women are able to articulate a collective voice and demonstrate collective strength.

It was also stressed that incorporating the feminist perspective in the concept of empowerment implies a long-term redesigning of societies that will be based on democratic relationships. The paper of Ms. Dighe talks about empowerment as dealing with strategic rather than practical gender needs.

2. Indicators of Empowerment

Understanding that empowerment is a complex issue with varying interpretations in different societal, national and cultural contexts, the participants also came out with a tentative listing of indicators.

At the level of the individual woman and her household:

- participation in crucial decision-making processes;
- extent of sharing of domestic work by men;
- extent to which a woman takes control of her reproductive functions and decides on family size;
- extent to which a woman is able to decide where the income she has earned will be chanelled to;
- feeling and expression of pride and value in her work;
- self-confidence and self-esteem; and
- ability to prevent violence.

At the community and/or organizational level:

- existence of women's organizations;
- allocation of funds to women and women's projects;
- increased number of women leaders at village, district, provincial and national levels;
- involvement of women in the design, development and application of technology;
- participation in community programmes, productive enterprises, politics and arts;
- involvement of women in non-traditional tasks; and
- increased training programmes for women; and
- exercising her legal rights when necessary.

At the national level:

- awareness of her social and political rights;
- integration of women in the general national development plan;
- existence of women's networks and publications;
- extent to which women are officially visible and recognized; and
- the degree to which the media take heed of women's issues.

3. Facilitating and Constraining Factors of Empowerment

Empowerment does not take place in a vacuum. In the same way that Ms. Lazo talks about women's state of powerlessness as a result of "a combination and interaction of environmental factors," one can also discuss the conditions/factors that can hasten or hinder empowerment. As above, the listing is a preliminary one based on the discussions.

Facilitating factors

- existence of women's organizations;
- availability of support systems for women;
- availability of women-specific data and other relevant information;
- availability of funds;
- feminist leadership;
- networking;
- favorable media coverage;
- favorable policy climate.

Constraining factors

- heavy work load of women;
- isolation of women from each other;
- illiteracy;
- traditional views that limit women's participation;
- no funds;
- internal strife/militarization/wars;
- disagreements/conflicts among women's groups;
- structural adjustment policies;
- discriminatory policy environment;
- negative and sensational coverage of media.

Strategies for the Future

Empowerment through education is ideally seen as a continuous holistic process with cognitive, psychological, economic and political dimensions in order to achieve emancipation. Given the complexity of political, societal and international interrelations, one has to systematically think about the strategies and concrete proposals for future action if one hopes to achieve such a goal.

A set of strategies on education, research/documentation, campaigns, networking, influencing policies, training and media was developed by the participants. As can be seen from the listing, the strategies are inter-related to each other.

a. Education

The formal and non-formal education systems would need to be considered. It would be important to analyze the gender content and to ascertain the manner in which it is addressed/not addressed in the educational system. On the basis of the analysis, curriculum changes would need to be brought about. Likewise it would be important to reorient the teachers on gender issues so that overall gender sensitization in the educational system could be brought about.

In concrete terms, this would mean:

- reorienting and reeducating policy makers;
- securing equal access for boys and girls in education;
- holding workshops/seminars for teachers;
- revising teaching materials;
- producing materials in local languages;
- implementing special programmes for women in the field of Adult Education;
- incorporating issues such as tradition, race, ethnicity, gender sensitization, urban and rural contexts in the programmes;
- raising awareness on the necessity for health care;
- politicizing women to show them how macro level mismanagement is responsible for their loss of jobs; and
- focusing on parents as role models.

b. Research/Documentation

The importance of doing participatory and action research was underscored. It was considered important to organize workshops to train grassroots women to conduct participatory research where they could develop skills to critically analyze their existing conditions. This will facilitate their organizing for collective action.

While participatory research was considered to be important, it was recognized that traditional quantitative research was also necessary. The guiding principle, however, was to share the results with the women in a language and manner that was understandable to them.

Research as a strategy would therefore entail:

- disseminating information;
- producing and disseminating information leaflets regarding women's rights;
- referring to women in all national and UN statistics;
- collecting oral history of women;
- documenting and analyzing successful and failed programmes of the women's movements;

- analyzing successful advocacy cases in order to learn about the arguments that persuade policy makers;
- collecting cross-cultural case studies;
- constantly evaluating research; and
- involving women as agents (instead of objects) of research.

c. Campaigns

If one is to have an effect in society, it is important to undertake campaign and lobby activities that will put the issue of gender in the minds of the legislators, policy-makers and the larger public. This will therefore mean:

- pushing for a dialogue between stake holders;
- raising gender issues within the national policy arena;
- pressuring to upgrade women's bureaus (which are a result of the UN Decade for Women) into ministries of women's affairs;
- lobbying for sex-equity and affirmative action legislation;
- lobbying for "counter structural adjustment policies;"
- organizing pressure groups (like "Greenpeace");
- using consumer power for boycotts;
- securing access to information;
- demanding child care centers; and
- producing videos and CDs, T-Shirts etc.

d. Networking

Through networking, it would be possible to share experiences and learn from one another. In this manner, understanding and solidarity among women's organizations, development organizations (governmental/non-governmental) and multilateral agencies could be forged. This would therefore entail networking at the national, regional and international levels. Moreover, at the international level, South-South linkages were considered to be particularly important.

- organizing at least one meeting a year of gender sensitive organizations;
- bringing together donor agencies, governments and NGOs;
- setting up a north-south dialogue and collaboration;
- setting up a south-south cooperation and exchange;
- linking women's movements all over the world;
- establishing alternative credit schemes that offer women access to funds.

e. Training

In our societies, there is a gender division of labor which dictates the kind of training one acquires. If one talks about women's empowerment, it is important that women have access to the different training opportunities previously denied them. This therefore means:

- preparing for jobs that are usually not open to them;
- providing income-generating projects that are market-oriented (not welfare-oriented projects); and
- training capable female leaders at all levels.

f. Media

Considering the attitudinal barriers in traditional societies and the role which the mass media play in reinforcing them, the following strategies were advanced:

- organizing mass media campaigns to raise awareness;
- creating a social climate friendly to women's issues;
- resisting the tendency to send women back to the kitchen; and
- disseminating information about conferences that will take place in the coming years.

Evaluation of the Seminar

As reflected in the preceding discussion, the seminar moved step by step to meet the objectives set out from the beginning. The participants were not only able to learn from

each other's experience but also collectively reflected on the concept of empowerment. Furthermore, they were also able to identify concrete proposals that they can take back to their organizations and implement, as well as to identify possible areas of collaboration with others.

The seminar also left the participants with the feeling that they were not alone in their work and, in fact, are part of a larger movement whose combined efforts can push for women's empowerment worldwide.

In terms of the conceptualization of empowerment, some participants would have preferred that a more concrete definition of empowerment and its indicators were ready to be taken back. They commented that the concept of empowerment has not yet been completed. Others, instead, were glad that a simplistic definition of empowerment had been avoided and that the discussion of the issue will be further elaborated when they get back to their organizations.

THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL BASES FOR EMPOWERMENT

Nelly P. Stromquist

Empowerment has become a widely used word. In spheres as different as management and labor unions, health care and ecology, banking and education, one hears of empowerment taking place. The popular use of the word also means that it has been overextended and applied in circumstances that clearly do not involve much power acquisition beyond some symbolic activity or event.

Empowerment in its emancipatory meaning, is a serious word--one which brings up the question of personal agency rather than reliance on intermediaries, one that links action to needs, and one that results in making significant collective change. It is also a concept that does not merely concern personal identity but brings out a broader analysis of human rights and social justice.

To gain a greater understanding of the concept, it might be helpful to look into its origins among popular movements. It emerged during the U.S. civil rights movements in the 1960s, after substantial work took place in civil disobedience and voter registration efforts to attain democratic rights for Afro-Americans. Displeased with the pace and scope of the changes, several black leaders (headed by Stokeley Carmichael) called for "black power," which they defined as:

> a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to begin to define their own goals, to link their own organizations, and to support those organizations (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967, p. 44).

Empowerment began to be applied within the women's movements in the mid 1970s. The similarities among oppressed groups are considerable because they face the common problem of limited willingness by those in control to see the seriousness of their condition and to work to solve it. Under the circumstances, the oppressed must themselves develop power for change to occur; power will not be given to them for the asking.

Applied to gender issues, the discussion of empowerment brings women into the political sphere, both private and public. Its international use probably began with the appearance of the book by Sen and Grown, *Development, Crisis, and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives* (1985), prepared for the Nairobi Conference at the end of the U.N. Decade for Women in 1985. In this book, a section on "Empowering Ourselves" clearly identifies the creation of women's organizations as central to the design and implementation of strategies for gender transformation.

Women and men are placed in bipolar categories by numerous institutions in society. These institutions, through day-to-day practices embedded in long-standing beliefs, construct male and female subjects who face strong forces to conform. Family practices, religious myths, the social division of labor, the sexual division of labor, marriage customs, the educational system, and civil laws combine to produce hierarchies, internalized beliefs, and expectations that are constraining but at the same time "naturalized" and thus seldom contested.

In this context, empowerment is a process to change the distribution of power, both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society. Traditionally the state has interpreted women's needs to suit its own preferences. The typical and enduring consideration that women have received from the state has been in their capacity of mothers and wives. Women therefore need to become their own

advocates to address problems and situations affecting them that were previously ignored. Empowerment ultimately involves a political process to produce consciousness among policy makers about women and to create pressure to bring about societal change.

There is an additional point to be made. Empowerment is a process which should center on adult women for two central reasons: first, their adult lives have produced many experiences of subordination and thus they know this problem very well, although they have not labeled it as such and second, the transformation of these women is fundamental to breaking the integrational reproduction of patriarchal authority.

Defining Empowerment

The subordinate position of women in society, even though this position is somewhat attenuated in higher social classes, has well-known manifestations: limited representation in the formal political system, a large share of the economy's informal sector and other types of labor with reduced financial rewards, almost exclusive responsibility for family and children, and the more subtle signs of narrow career aspirations and low self-esteem. Not infrequently, subordination is also manifested in unwanted pregnancies and wife-beating.

Women in many societies, particularly in Latin America, have relied on "networks of reciprocal exchange" (Lomnitz, 1977) that provide information and assistance from family, friends, and neighbors to obtain basic services such as health, childcare, food, and even services such as loans and job procurement. These networks operate within all social classes, the poor as well as the elites (Lomnitz, 1977 and 1984). At one level, these informal networks constitute a valuable source of assistance for women. But at another level, these structures create mechanisms of social control through the maintenance of notions of femininity and masculinity, and through deference to authoritarian, patriarchal rule.

If subordination has many facets, so has empowerment. Empowerment is a sociopolitical concept that goes beyond "formal political participation" and "consciousness raising." A full definition of empowerment must include cognitive, psychological, political, and economic components.

The cognitive component refers to women's understanding of their conditions of subordination and the causes of such conditions at both micro and macro levels of society. It involves understanding the self and the need to make choices that may go against cultural and social expectations, and understanding patterns of behavior that create dependence, interdependence, and autonomy within the family and in the society at large (Hall, 1992). It involves acquiring new knowledge to create a different understanding of gender relations as well as destroying old beliefs that structure powerful gender ideologies. The cognitive component of empowerment involves knowledge about their sexuality beyond family planning techniques, for taboos on sex information have mystified the nature of women and men and provided justification for men's physical and mental control of women. Another important cognitive area involves legal rights. In most countries, including democratically advanced nations, legislation for gender equity and women's rights is well ahead of practice; women therefore need to know which legal rights already exist in order to press for their implementation and enforcement. A more comprehensive and articulated type of knowledge needed for empowerment concerns elements that shape conjugal dynamics such as control of wives' fertility, sexuality, child bearing and rearing, companionship, feelings of affection and rejection, unpaid domestic work, and household decision-making. As Beneria and Roldan observe, these elements constitutes wives' duties under the "marriage contract" (1987, pp. 137-139); therefore, they are the most vulnerable to patriarchal control.

The psychological component includes the development of feelings that women can act at personal and societal levels to improve their condition as well as the formation of the belief that they can succeed in their change efforts. The sex role socialization of women has inculcated attributes of "learned helplessness" within women. Through the

repeated experience of uncontrollable effects, many women come to believe that they cannot modify their environment or personal situations and thus their persistance in problem-solving is diminished (Jack, 1992). Attributions of helplessness preclude opportunities for mediation and compromise and often women respond by complying with female stereotypes of passivity and self-sacrifice. Clearly, not every woman succumbs to the dominant sex-role socialization forces and several are able to question and even reject them. But, in general, it is a well known fact that many women, particularly those in low-income household, develop very discernable low levels of self-esteem.

One cannot teach self-confidence and self-esteem; one must provide the conditions in which these can develop. Empowerment cannot be developed among "beneficiaries" of programs but only by "participants". Empowerment requires involving women directly in planning and implementation of projects (Rao et al., 1991). Activities that seek empowerment must involve women in all stages of any specific project, though not necessarily with the same intensity at all times. Women must participate in problem definition, the identification of concrete solutions to problems, the implementation of these solutions, and the assessment of the efforts undertaken. That this may involve some inefficiencies and trial and error, is a strong possibility. But experts also make mistakes. And women must be given opportunities to assert themselves. In the long run, advantages outnumber disadvantages because the skills gained through these collective, participatory approaches are transferable to a variety of social situations.

The psychological element is important but it needs to be strengthened with economic resources. Even though outside work for women often means a double burden, the empirical evidence supports the notion that access to work increases a woman's economic independence and with it a greater level of general independence is created. As Hall (1992) notes, economic subordination must be neutralized for women to be empowered. The economic component of empowerment requires that women be able to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of financial autonomy, no matter how small and hard to obtain at the beginning. Income generating programs are difficult to implement because they are risky, time-consuming, and inefficient in the initial phases. But they can improve over time if accompanied by such necessary skills as marketing, accounting and sufficient funding. The problem for income-generating projects is not that they are not a good solution but rather that they have resulted in failure because they have been poorly designed, implemented and funded. There is the know-how to turn income-generating activities into successful commercial ventures. Absent is the commitment to use them in a meaningful way.

The political component of empowerment entails the ability to analyze the surrounding environment in political and social terms; it also means the ability to organize and mobilize for social change. In consequence, an empowerment process must involve individual awareness, and collective action is fundamental to the aim of attaining social transformation. As Griffin observes:

> Redistribution strategies depend for their success on mobilizing the population for grassroots development, on exploiting the myriad opportunities at the local level for small-scale projects and on organizing the various groups in the community around effective institutions so that they can articulate their demands, establish priorities and work together for the common good (p.63).

We noted ealier that there are persons who have used the concept of "empowerment" to mean only superficial advancement. Conversely, there are persons who used other terms and yet come quite close to our definition of empowerment. One such individual is Joke Schrijvers, who sees "autonomy" as "a fundamental criticism of the existing social, economic, and political order" (1991, p. 6). She defines autonomy as:

> an anti-hierarchical concept, which stimulates critical and creative thinking and action. What I personally like best in it, is that it expresses an inner attitude of strength, an attitude which makes room for transformation. Transformation which comes from within, which springs from inner resources of one's own as an individual or a collectivity, which moves bottom-up and goes against the unwanted domination [on the part] of others (Schrijvers, 1991, pp. 5-6).

I think that autonomy, as defined by Schrijvers, is not dissimilar to empowerment. Rather, it seems to emphasize the psychological facet of the concept. Her definition is useful because it highlights that power "from within" is very important before women may exert any power "over" other segments of society, particular the state.

Creating Empowerment

The prime target of empowerment must be adult women and, in the context of social justice and transformation, they must be low-income adult women. Within this group, authoritarian behaviors by husbands in the home make families and households in general a terrain that serves the maintenance rather than the transformation of unequal gender relations.

A prerequisite to empowerment, therefore, necessitates stepping outside the home and participating in some form of collective undertaking that can be successful, thus developing a sense of independence and competence among the women. The creation of a small, cohesive group, with which its members may identify closely is paramount. We know that because of the small scale and voluntary nature of these associations many members gain valuable experience and confidence in both leadership and membership tasks. The central activity of the group could vary; it could be literacy activity, income-generation, mutual basic needs support, etc. Whatever the objective, the group activity should be designed so that its process and its goal-attainment foster the development of a sense of self-esteem, competence, and autonomy.

Empowerment will go through a series of phases. Awareness of conditions at the personal and collective levels will lead to some public action, however small. Following from this beginning there should occur a renegotiation of family conditions. As women become more available for public action, they should be able to place more demands upon the state. Expressed in a diagrammatic way, the sequence presented in Figure 1 is anticipated.

Women can attain empowerment through different points of departure: emancipatory knowledge, economic leverage, political mobilization. While many poor women work outside the home to support their families and the tasks they perform are exhausting and meagerly rewarded, access to income improves their authority in the home. Working women, regardless of how inferior their position and small their income, have a greater sense of control over their lives and more power and control over resources within the family than nonworking women (for a detailed ethnographic study comparing working and nonworking women in six communities in the Dominican Republic, see Finlay, 1989). A study of 140 women homeworkers in Mexico City by Beneria and Roldan (1987) found that while no simple relationship existed between women's economic resources and decision making, paid work increased the women's self-esteem and wives who made a considerable contribution to household expenditures (more than 40 percent) had augmented their domestic and conjugal decision making.

Mothers' clubs make possible the creation of free and socially accepted spaces for women. Although many of their activities do not seek transformational objectives, the clubs can provide fertile ground for empowering processes. The crucial point about these mothers' clubs, usually created under religious auspices in Latin America and Africa, is that they represent a large number of the collective spaces already occupied by women.

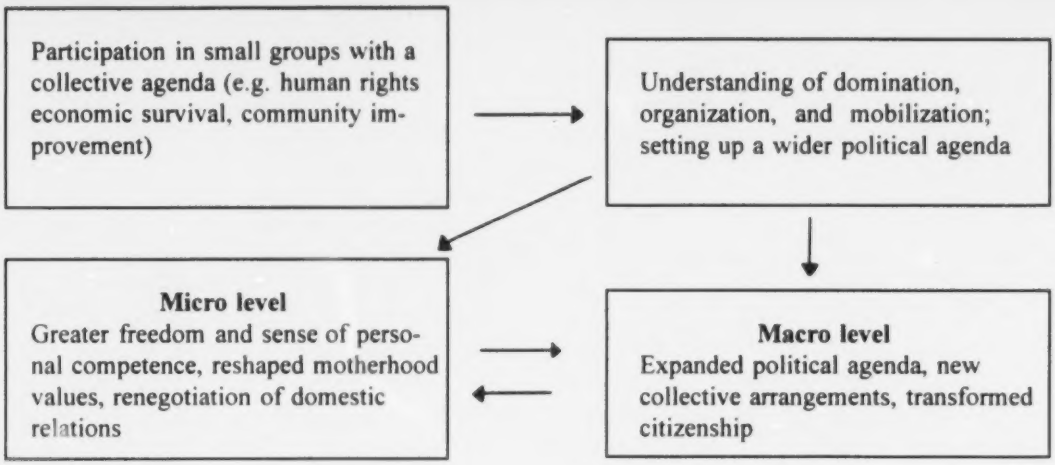
Participation in small groups with a collective agenda (e.g. human rights economic survival, community improvement)
Understanding of domination, organization, and mobilization; setting up a wider political agenda
Micro level
Greater freedom and sense of personal competence, reshaped motherhood values, renegotiation of domestic relations
Macro level
Expanded political agenda, new collective arrangements, transformed citizenship

Fig. 1. *Theorized Chain of Events in the Empowering Process*

Literacy skills can also be empowering, but they must be accompanied by a process that is participatory and a content that questions established gender relations, features that, unfortunately, do not characterize the great majority of literacy programs. Nonetheless, evidence from Asia and Latin America indicates that women with newly acquired literacy skills have moved into self-help organizations ranging from neighborhood soup kitchens to public health groups (Bown, 1990; Stromquist, 1993).

A description of two successful empowerment projects for women in Latin America might be helpful. The first project took place in Chile through the Rural School of Women, which functioned in three rural sites. The school provided working rural women with a consiousness-raising experience in the areas of family and work; it was organized so that the women spent several days together over a period of six months as part of their training. This project relied on in-depth interviews to produce life histories of these working women that were later used in group discussions. The women's increased awareness of gender asymmetries culminated in the drafting of demands specific to nine occupations filled by women in rural areas. These demands were later disseminated among labor unions, farmers' cooperatives, and women's groups, thereby increasing knowledge about these working women's conditions and needs.

The second project involved action-research activities in São Paulo, Brazil. Women in a total of 94 mothers' clubs engaged in a process of collective history and understanding of the functions, strengths, and weaknesses of their organizations. The investigation, which lasted two years, resulted in the production of a widely popular play, audiovisual materials, and reports that were disseminated among all the other clubs. The knowledge and experience produced through this project led many of its leaders to organize the first national feminist meeting on "popular education and the women's movement" in Brazil in 1986. (For a more detailed account of these experiences, see Stromquist, 1993a).

The Chilean and the Brazilian projects provides evidence that through authentic empowerment women will acquire a better understanding of their world, a clearer sense of their ability to change it, and resources to develop leverage. In the immediate term they will not change the world - hierarchies and centers of power will remain for a while - but gradually these empowered women can erode the traditional power and redefine it.

The Pedagogical Rationale for Empowerment

The creation of critical minds requires a physical and reflective space where new ideas may be entertained and argued, and were transformational demands may occur outside the surveillance of those who may seek to control these changes.

Sara Evans, an experienced member of the feminist movement in the U.S., reviewing the social roots of feminism in the 1950s and 1960s, concluded that prerequisites to an "insurgent collective identify" are the following:

1. social spaces within which members of an oppressed group can develop an independent sense of worth in contrast to their received definitions as second class or inferior citizens;

2. role models of people breaking out of patterns of passivity;

3. an ideology that can explain the sources of oppression, justify revolt, and provide a vision of a qualitatively different future;

4. a threat to the new-found sense of self that forces a confrontation with the inherited cultural definitions - in other words, it becomes impossible for the individual to "make it on her own" and escape the boundaries of the oppressed group; and finally

5. a communication or friendship network through which a new interpretation can spread, activating the insurgent consciousness into a social movement. (1979, pp. 219-220; see also Freeman, 1975, pp. 44-70).

The need for a social space, a "free institutional space," for people with a shared condition was first discovered by people in the U.S. movement of the political left of the 1970s. Interestingly, recent findings from organizational behavior support this strategy.

Organizational theory and empirical evidence support the notion that knowledge is socially constructed. A process of mobilization and collective action develops a shared cognitive system and shared memories. These forms of organizational cognition, which call for the understanding of events, open the opportunity for social interpretation as well as the development of relatively dense interpersonal networks for sharing and evaluating the information, thus creating effective learning systems:

> Organizational learning can be relatively low level or single loop, involving only minor adjustments and fine tuning of existing organizational images and maps. Conversely, it can be reflected in the alteration of existing norms, assumptions, and values that govern action. Such learning is referred to as high-level or double-loop learning (Cousins and Earl, 1992, p. 401).

This collective learning, which draws upon the theory of social learning of Albert Bandura, has been argued to be one of the greatest benefits from participatory evaluations in education (Cousins and Earl, 1992). In my view, the rationale of learning that occurs in women's groups is the same.

Empowerment can succeed only if it is a mode of learning close to the women's everyday experiences and if it builds upon the intellectual, emotional, and cultural resources the participants bring to their social space. In the Chilean and the Brazilian projects mentioned earlier there was a clear focus upon knowing the experiences of the women in their everyday life; there was an equally strong focus on making those experiences collective. This discussion of everyday life has a number of consequences. When women talk to other women about their personal experiences, they validate it and construct a new reality. When women describe their own experiences, they discover their role as agents in their own world and also start establishing connections between their micro realities and macrosocial contexts. It should be clear that the discussion of personal lives, of needs and dreams, necessitates of a friendly, receptive social space. Here, the task of a group facilitator becomes essential because this

person must create a participatory process which provides constant encouragement and support to the members. The role of the facilitator is not an easy one; training to create and maintain an empowerment process is necessary.

Schrijvers proposes four criteria to assess an existing degree of women's autonomy:

1. women's control of their own sexuality and fertility; forms of shared mothering, between women or between women and men;

2. a division of labor which allows women and men equal access to, and control over the means of production;

3. forms of cooperation and organization of women which will enable and help them to control their own affairs; and

4. positive gender conceptions which legitimate women's sense of dignity and self-respect, and their right to self-determination (Schrijvers. p.3).

These criteria approximate to the notion of multi-faceted empowerment. But they need to be toned down to address the concrete form in which empowerment is likely to take place, that is, within a specific project or program that is organizationally bounded. In this case, empowerment should be assessed by the number of facets the project addresses (cognitive, psychological, economic), the changes it brings in terms of women's individual understanding and collective action, the strength and stability of their organization, the renegotiation of authority it enables at the household and community levels, and the range of objectives it identifies for future action.

Empowerment and Education

In talking about empowerment activities I have focused exclusively on adult women and therefore considered only nonformal education. Does it mean formal education has no empowering role for girls?

Formal education has substantial contributions to make to an improved gender identity through the removal of sexual stereotypes in textbooks, the fostering of positive gender identities through the curricula, the retraining of teachers to be gender sensitive, and the provision of nonsexist guidance and counseling. These elements, in my view, are crucial antecedents of empowerment, not empowerment itself. I prefer to reserve the concept of empowerment for behaviors that tie understanding to a clear plan of action to vindicate the rights of women. If the concept of empowerment is freely applied to changes that are only cognitive or psychological, empowerment would not necessarily have to be translated into a collective dimension. And in the case of women's transformation, it is imperative that social structures be rearranged.

Barriers to Empowerment

While it is clear that many benefits may derive from collective action, it must also be remembered that participation in groups with a serious purpose of vindication will demand sustained involvement.

Poor women are busy women. Not only do they spend much time and energy responding to family needs, but they also face conditions such as rigid authoritarian spouse control, violence at home, social expectations regarding motherhood, and unsafe community environments that limit their physical mobility. Under these conditions, participation is fraught with obstacles and only a few will find it possible to become available for participation. The percentage of women that will participate under these circumstances is not well known, but judging from rates of participation in related activities, particularly literacy groups which call for prolonged involvement, this proportion may be less than five percent of the possible population. Projects working on empowerment will be small in their beginnings and take a substantial amount of time to mature and solidify. Ambitious expectations of quick and mass appeal have no basis in fact. How to make it possible for

women to engage in empowering activities while they face a critical everyday survival is a real challenge.

The increased interest in empowerment comes at a time when structural adjustment policies are being implemented in many of the developing countries. There is strong evidence that these policies have had a negative impact on women in multiple dimensions of their lives, including education (see Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989, and UNICEF, 1987). In fact, the Commonwealth Secretariat report concluded that,

> the types of stabilization and adjustment policies followed in the 1980s have brought to a standstill many of the practical advances which women made earlier, and have actually reversed some of the most fundamental of them like education and health (p.105).

To break some of the barriers in empowerment, the work of three sets of actors will be needed: grassroots and feminist groups to do the outreach and work with marginalized women who need support; women in development and international institutions who can provide the funds necessary to create projects and programs with empowerment features; and women in academic circles, who will contribute theoretical analysis of how gender is created and how it can be modified in society.

Avoiding the Mirage

Empowerment is needed to break a number of real dichotomies affecting women: personal/collective, domestic/public, material/ideological. Women who are empowered should be able to stop the undesirable, to transform ongoing practices, and to create new visions. While several governments and institutions are including the word empowerment in their discourse, much less often is there evidence of developing and funding activities that identify empowerment as a genuine goal.

This evidence is coming through acts of both omission and commission. NGOs, particularly women-run NGOs, are the organizations most likely to work on empowering women. As important elements of the civil society, they are groups where democratic practices can begin to develop. Yet, the financial support they receive from the state and from even progressive donor agencies is miniscule compared to their needs and their potential for expansion.

In the prescriptions for structural adjustment in many of the developing countries, scant attention is paid to the burdens that the diminution of social services by the state brings upon poor women. In a related matter, the macro economic forces that create underdevelopment and inequality and that ultimately affect the social and sexual division of labor are not a significant part of any ongoing international negotiation.

Evidence by omission comes from recent efforts to make the world more democratic. Policy initiatives by USAID (AID, 1990a and 1990b) and a blue-ribbon committee study on the problems of democracy in Latin America (The Aspen Institute, 1992) recognize the importance of working with public institutions but offer only a weak acknowledgement of the need to work with women's groups so that they can develop their autonomy and advance their agenda.

A key document in education, the World Declaration on Education for All, drafted at the international conference in Jomtien in March 1990, acknowledges the need for women to benefit from educational opportunities and considers that the "most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation" (Inter-Agency Commission, WCEFA, p. 45). Its plan of action calls for new partners, including the role of "non-governmental and other voluntary associations" (Inter-Agency Commission, WCEFA, 1990, p. 58). Yet, it is not clear how much support will be forthcoming for women-run NGOs, nor to what extent emancipatory, empowerment-producing educational projects for adult women will be supported past a few that may involve literacy. A sign that EFA will not pay significant attention to adult

women is reflected in the agenda of the Second EFA Forum, to be held in late 1993. The forum will focus on four factors: early childhood development, assessment of learning, financing, and educational content (UNESCO, 1992, p. 6). These issues address mostly formal education, much less questions of empowerment.

Some important recommendations that move us beyond the definition and conceptual framework of empowerment must be considered if the concept is to become a reality. The Commonwealth Secretariat's report cited earlier (1989) has clear recommendations for new funding for women. They suggest the use of "structured markets" or the allotment of a certain proportion of credit, foreign exchange, and public expenditures to women (p. 106). This report also suggests strengthening Women in Development (WID) units and funding directly women's organizations, from trade unions to cooperatives (pp. 128-129). These recommendations are concrete and sound. They should be heeded; otherwise, women's empowerment will remain a concept in search of true supporters.

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Note

1. *This section draws in part from my previous work (Stromquist, 1988).*

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Lucita Lazo

Let me begin by thanking the UNESCO for giving me the opportunity to think aloud with a group who shares a common interest - the empowerment of women. There are more of us now thinking about the subject but still not enough. I have been asked to talk about empowerment in the light of my practical experiences in Southeast Asia where with the support of the DANIDA (Government of Denmark) and with the International Labour Office as the implementing agency, we are making efforts to upgrade the working and living conditions of women workers in the putting out system.

I have been assigned to address two objectives:

a) to have a definition of and a conceptual framework for understanding women's empowerment;

b) to have a tentative list of indicators (manifestations) and processes or mechanisms of empowerment.

My task is obviously to abstract from my practical and concrete experiences and help crystallise the concept of empowerment. For this reason I shall be moving from the concrete to the abstract and from the particular to the general from time to time.

To make my own thinking process easier, I thought three basic questions can and should be asked: what is empowerment, why empowerment, and how does one go about the business of empowerment?

Let me go about my assigned task by giving you a brief background of what I do in the field. Hence my discussion will be in two parts. Part I presents what I do in the field. Part II will be an attempt to interpret those experiences, learn from them and help clarify and understand the notion of empowerment.

Women's Empowerment In the Making

The Case of Women Workers in the Putting Out System

Ka Lilay weaves sawali or palm leaves for a subcontractor in her remote village in the Philippines. But she is not paid by her employer, who happens to be a subcontractor/trader for an exporter. Unable to deliver on time for reasons of his own, the subcontractor[1] could not collect his fees. Then, he decided not to pay thirty sawali weavers working for him on the pretext that their products are of poor quality. Can Ka Lilay and her co-workers complain and file a case in court and have their wages paid?

Ibu Hassana has been embroidering traditional costumes in a far-flung village in Indonesia since she was twelve. At thirty-five, her eyes are blurred from her day to day threading and stitching. Too poor, she could not buy a pair of glasses, least of all, consult an eye doctor. Can she ask her employer to give her glasses or to foot her doctor's bill?

There are many more of such cases. The common denominator is that the victims are mostly women who work under subcontracting or putting out arrangements. Putting out is a system whereby traders and middlemen, with little investment on their part, collect orders for the production of a good or service and assign the jobs to women in the villages or urban slums of many developing countries in Southeast Asia such as Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. In turn the women produce the goods or services from their homes or nearby premises, making them known as homebased workers.

Lacking the legal status of a worker due to the absence of formal employer-employee relationship, homebased workers make goods

and services under special arrangements. They work in their own homes without a written contract under the putting out system or subcontracting arrangement. Their homes are actually extensions of factories and for all intents and purposes, they are part of the factory. Yet while they are part of factory production activities, they are not counted in the benefits extended to factory workers. In this sense, they are workers in limbo. Homeworkers' working set-up is highly informal; they do not have maternity and sick leaves, and medical and social insurance and similar such benefits. Homebased workers in Southeast Asia, like their kindred in South Asia, are isolated and unorganized. There is no single unit or body of government that pays attention to their welfare.

Could they ever hope to have any form of social protection?

Against this social backdrop, the International Labour Office launched a subregional development project entitled "Rural Women Workers in the Putting Out System," hereafter referred to as the homeworkers' project. The project covers three Southeast Asian countries and is funded by DANIDA (Government of Denmark).

Purpose of the Project

The project seeks to enhance the employment and promote the working welfare of homebased women workers, especially those in the rural areas. The two-pronged project goal was to ensure jobs and humane, non-exploitative conditions of work. This is a tall order. Many times, the protection of good conditions of work jeopardises the very jobs of those being protected, especially women. In labour surplus countries, any move to increase wages could mean the potential loss of jobs.

The ultimate purpose of the project is to extend social protection to the women, without losing their jobs or source of income. This could mean a number of things such as: increasing their piece rates and wages, reducing exploitation by the middleman, reducing dependence on the middleman for job orders, affording health, housing, education and other appropriate benefits.

Increasing piece rates implies having to bargain with an employer. Alone, a homeworker's chance of winning is nil given the comparative strength of the employer. Homeworkers are isolated, fragmented and unorganised. To match the strength of the employer, they would have to marshal their individual strengths into a collective. Organisation becomes necessary.

For some homebased workers, the work stops when their employers stop sending them orders. The only alternative is for them to produce and sell to the market directly when there are no such orders. But this means having the means to buy raw materials and the connection to other buyers and market outlets. Many homeworkers are poor, assetless, illiterate, and have neither marketing skills nor connections to markets and buyers. Without a collateral and a guarantor, they could not borrow from the banks and formal financial institutions. With little knowledge of markets and marketing, they could only sell on a limited scale to the surrounding villages or within their villages. Add to this their general lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, they are hard put into starting an enterprise of their own. Access and control over essential resources and social services is one obstacle in their way.

Exploitation by traders and middlemen comes in the form of paying extremely low piece rates and demanding delivery on time, sometimes penalising the women if they fail to deliver and abandonment of the obligation to pay for whatever reason. Further, miscellaneous costs of production such as electricity, work space and the like are passed on to the homeworker. However, some traders could earn huge profits by selling at high costs to the exporters and reducing as far as they can the wages of the homebased petty producers. How can the homebased workers get away from unfair treatment? With the exporter/employer located in the city and relying only upon the middleman and traders, the homebased rural women oftentimes do not even know who their employer is. Who would give them social protection?

The situation I have described thus far shows you the state of powerlessness of the women workers in the putting out system. Our concern for them arises from an underlying belief that society has a moral obligation to help the disadvantaged and to redress poverty and ensure equity. And empowerment is argued to be the appropriate mode of doing this.

The Notion of Empowerment

- Empowerment denotes a **process** of acquiring, providing, bestowing the resources and the means or enabling the **access to and control over such means and resources.** This implies that the individual has the potential to acquire power upon her own initiative or that another party could make it possible for her to have power. This point is vital because it identifies the potential agents of empowerment: it is the person who is to be empowered or it could be another person or agent. Empowerment could be a self-propelled and self-propelling process. If by some gift of God, it dawns on a woman that her life could become better if she tried to act upon such thoughts, link up with the source of resources, then she is facilitating her own empowerment.

- Empowerment **enables** the person to gain insight and have an awareness of what is undesirable and unfavorable about her current situation, perceive a better situation, the possibilities of attaining it and realising what is within her reach and what she could do to get to a better situation. This characterisation of empowerment implies that the process could involve a **change of perceptions** about the self, the environment, and the relationship of the self and the environment. It is a process that involves the creation of images, the generation of a "push" to act or what psychologists call motivation. Change of perceptions implies a change of attitude and a change in one's outlook in life.

- Empowerment enables women to **generate choices** and as an outcome of having such choices, she **acquires leverage and bargaining power**. Empowered, a woman would take steps to find and/or create options or find and link to the means to find the options. An external party could help women find and create such options. When one has options, one can a) choose not to follow the pressures and demands of the more powerful party; b) ask and negotiate with the other party to change the situation and make it more acceptable.

For example, women homeworkers who can link and sell to other buyers can have the possibility of refusing bad deals such as exploitative and low-paying orders from traders and middlemen. But since the Third World countries are labour surplus markets, the women's options are stunted, making for a situation of no choice for the women.

Empowerment makes a person able to choose and able to demand. It makes the person able to choose her goals, generate opportunities to reach the goals and determine the overall direction of her life. This makes the notion of empowerment a fascinating and powerful one.

In the Third World, some women have no possibility to choose their own life goals and this indicates a state of powerlessness. We are aware for instance of societies and tribes where women are committed to marriage by their parents even before they are born or ready for it. By the norm of their society, this mode of behaviour is acceptable; yet it may not always be for the betterment or happiness of the woman. Still the woman has no choice and is therefore powerless under the situation. Hers is to obey and not to protest.

- Empowerment enables a woman to gain **relative strength** as a result of having choices and bargaining power. The consequences could be reduction of

invisibility as she is able to demand attention from those concerned, especially decision and policy makers, to generate the appropriate positive responses, reduction of vulnerability, reduction or elimination of exploitability, availability and use of social services and resources. Ultimately, empowerment should lead to the improvement of women's socio-economic status.

- Simply put, tautological though it may be, empowerment is the acquisition or the bestowing of power. The variables of power are the variables of empowerment as well. Power is a complex quality that gives the person the authority and the strength to exercise control and influence. Power arises from possessing a complex combination of personal and physical resources that is being bestowed or being acquired in the process of empowerment.

Power implies a relationship. There is one individual or party who possesses (or has greater chance of accessing and availing) a physical, economic, social and/or psychological resource and/or quality which becomes the basis for the exercise of control and influence over another. Conversely, in the power relationship, there is an individual or party who is the "weaker" whom the other party controls.

In layman's parlance, power means having the **capacity and the means** to direct one's life towards desired social, political and economic goals and/or status. It is the ability to influence events and control outcomes in the environment. The crux of power lies in the **possession of and/or access to and control over means and resources.**

Let us digress for a while and try to apply this concept to the case of the women homeworkers, and let us look at the variables of power. Women workers in the putting out system are powerless vis-à-vis their employers, the traders and middlemen. The women homeworkers' powerlessness can be traced to a number of factors. An indicative list is shown in Figure 1

▸Personal Factors	x	▸Environmental/Sociological Factors
Illiteracy		Societal conditions
Lack of skills		
Lack of information		weak economy ==> no job options
		labour surplus ==> no job options
		gender ideology ==> discrimination
Lack of money		no public awareness ==> no government
		policy ==> women's invisibility
(poverty/assetlessness)		no protective laws for women ==> no social protection
Lack of awareness		Household conditions
Low self esteem		
		female headed
Lack of self-confidence		big family size
Low sense of efficacy		high dependency ratio
		Working conditions
		isolation, fragmentation, unregistered ==> invisiblility
		atomisation, lack of organisation ==> vulnerability,
		no work contract ==> exploitability
		no clear status as workers ==> no social protection
		no direct contract with
		the employer ==> dependence on middleman

Fig. 1. *Illustrative Analysis of the Variables of Power*

Women's state of powerlessness is borne by a **combination and interaction of environmental and personal factors.** In the case of the women homeworkers, the conditions of work in the putting out system intensify or aggravate the disadvantage they suffer like most other women in society. This makes it necessary to pay special attention to their conditions of work.

Women's powerlessness arises from their illiteracy, lack of awareness, lack of information and knowledge about markets and lack of skills, their overall lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, their lack of money, their lack of job opportunities, lack of connections to those who can provide jobs and lend them money to start their own small enterprise. The women's very lack of awareness and insight into their circumstances aggravate their powerlessness. They remain in a state of blissful ignorance and most survive in the belief that they cannot change their poor situation. As a result of this long-standing poverty and powerlessness the women lose their sense of control over their environment. They have low efficacy, meaning they lack belief in their own ability to control and influence the outcomes and events in their world.

That the women work individually and silently in their homes reinforces their powerlessness. They are said to be isolated, atomised and fragmented. This way they are unable to share and discuss their common concerns, problems and solutions. With little exposure to the outside world as they are preoccupied with their day to day chores, the rural women homeworkers are not aware of possibilities out there. Ignorance and lack of awareness perpetuate their powerlessness.

The women's circumstances also contribute to their powerlessness. For example, in underdeveloped and weak economies, labour exceeds job supply and limits the job options for the general populace. Coupled with the prevailing gender ideology that discriminates against women, the job options for women are even narrower. Lack of public awareness about the burdens of women and the conditions of their life and work make for benign neglect by the government so that there is no policy or programme to promote women homeworkers' welfare.

Similarly, household conditions either precipitate, perpetuate or aggravate women's powerlessness. For example, limited resources for education will give preference to education of sons than daughters. Women are then consigned to illiteracy.

The case of a woman homeworker demonstrates a situation where the working conditions keep the woman invisible to the government and policy makers because of her isolation. Her lack of a work contract, an ambiguous status as a worker, no clear cut employer-employee relationship and no direct contact with her employer altogether make her vulnerable and exploitable. She does not have the benefit of social protection - all of which are manifestations or symptoms of powerlessness.

- Empowerment is a moving state; it is a continuum that varies in degrees of power. It is relative. The diagram below visualises this concept. One can move from an extreme state of absolute lack of power to the other extreme of having absolute power. The extreme ends of the continuum are of course "idealised" states.

Empowerment

Powerlessness < ---------- > **Powerfulness**

The power continuum

Now, the practical question is **how** can women be empowered?

Again, let me answer the question by telling you of what we have done in the field. Then we shall come back and extract the mechanisms and manifestations of empowerment.

Making Empowerment Happen for Homeworkers in the Philippines

The strategy is a combined and iterative process of doing studies on the situation of homeworkers, educating and training them to study and research their own situation and formulate solutions and appropriate practical actions, organising and teaching the homeworkers to organise other homeworkers. In addition, they are also trained on the productivity enhancement of their economic projects.

At the grassroots, the actions proceeded in three stages:

1) selecting, preparing and equipping the community workers and trainers for the process of organising;

2) actual organising of the homeworkers;

3) networking and consolidating the homebased organisations and strengthening them by increasing their access to financing, markets and essential social services.

A vital feature of the project strategy is the active involvement of the target group. The homeworkers themselves, with guidance from the women academics and activists and the ILO, co-determine the direction of their development. In collecting background information at the village level, the women learn how to formulate questions, conduct interviews, collect, analyse and interpret data. This is the essence of the participatory action research approach.

At the individual level, the homeworkers' project could have short and long term impacts. Presently, the main concern is to create and establish an institution which could give the women homeworkers **collective strength and a collective voice**; in short a power base.

The practical actions consisted of education and training in organising and how to do participatory action research, development of training materials and paralegal training of the homebased workers in the various provinces. These activities prepared the women for the massive organising work to be done. Thenceforth, educating, training and organising activities continue to be pursued and the campaign for homeworkers' welfare in the Philippines was born. Over the long term, the project seeks to improve the economic and social status of the women through education, training and organisation, all of which are geared towards empowerment of the rural women. It also seeks to establish linkages with government and non-government organisations (GO-NGO), to gain increased access to services essential to homebased producers and to establish within the organisations services and facilities for women homebased workers.

In summary, the project activities revolved around three action areas:

a) Education, Training and Research of Community Workers and Women;
b) Organising of the Homebased Workers; and
c) Strengthening the Organisation and Empowerment of Homeworkers.

The Target Group

The rural women homeworkers in the Philippines mostly operate as unorganised and isolated workers. Although they are by law considered to have legal status as workers and are entitled to protection, in practice they do not enjoy the benefits which regular factory workers have. Their being isolated and unorganised make it difficult to apply and enforce the protective provisions of the law.

There is no registry of homeworkers although there is a roster of subcontractors at the Department of Trade and Industry. For the purpose of labor protection and monitoring of the application of labour laws on homeworkers, there is no practical administrative system yet.

Homebased workers have no institutional means for voicing their common concerns, influencing national policy and programmes, pressing for their rights and redressing their grievances.

Women homeworkers are **not** members of the trade unions although lately, the trade unions have become more accommodating towards them. At the international level, the

International Federation of Plantation and Agricultural Workers (IFPAAW) and the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU) are both taking cognizance of the issue. However, it may take time for concrete actions at the field level to take effect.

Awareness-raising Workshops, Meetings and Dialogues

One drawback of the project was the lack of public awareness of the plight of homeworkers. To overcome this, meetings, workshops and dialogues were held. For the first time, homeworkers' concerns were publicly presented to the government and other concerned organisations. Policy recommendations and a national plan of action were accordingly formulated.

Women homeworkers listed their needs and concerns, effectively setting the direction of future practical actions. Their participation was initiated and underscored in the series of consultative meetings launched upon the initiative of a homeworker, later to become the president of the National Network of Homeworkers, locally known as *Pambansang Tagapag-ugnay ng mga Manggagawa sa Bahay*, or PATAMABA. Having attended the subregional technical meeting in Bangkok in June 1989, she hatched the idea of conducting consultations.

One hundred and eighty garments homeworkers from Bulacan province attended the consultative meetings from June to September 1989. In these meetings, the women aired, identified, discussed and documented their common problems and their issues and most important, proposed solutions.

On 1 October 1989, the National Coordinating Council of the National Network of Homeworkers was formed, the first leap forward in the homeworkers' campaign.

The women's collective recommendations were presented to the National Tripartite Workshop on 2 - 6 October 1989. Representatives of government, NGOs, workers and employers organisations attended the workshop.[2]

The research findings earlier mentioned were presented in the workshop and were vital in initiating the debate on what to do in order to alleviate the plight of the homeworkers. Notably, the homeworkers contribution in the debate proved highly instructive to the participants, especially those in government. The women homeworkers had a position of their own which they read before the Labour Department secretary.

Awakening of Government Consciousness

Upon the request of the Bureau of Women and Young Workers, the *Katipunan ng mga Babaing Pilipina* (KaBaPa) took the Labour Undersecretary in charge of Labour Standards on a field trip to the homeworkers' sites (i.e. papier mâché makers and garment sewers), prior to his attendance and chairmanship of the ILO Committee of Experts' Meeting on the Social Protection of Homeworkers in October 1990 in Geneva. These village visits were featured in the October 1990 issue of the *Philippine Labour*, a publication of the Department of Labour.

Media Campaigns

PATAMABA printed its brochure for wider distribution in order to inform the public about the existence of the homeworkers' cause and network. With the assistance of KaBaPa, it now publishes its own newsletter called *Bahay Ugnayan* which features articles on homework-related issues. The first issue was distributed during the first national congress of homeworkers in May 1991.

Radio and television interviews as well as press releases and articles on homework have been shown and issued since the subregional project was launched. Such activities are continuously pursued along with the national workshops as well as the subregional workshop hosted by the KaBaPa-PATAMABA on 7 - 10 May 1991.

The subregional workshop was a forum for exchanging experiences among the participating countries in the ILO-DANIDA subregional project. The KaBaPa-PATAMABA, with the technical assistance of the Philippine Department of Labour and Employment, organised the workshop and financial sponsorship of the ILO, the

Netherlands Government, the University of the Philippines' College of Social Work and Community Development and the Women's Studies Center.

Education and Training

The women were trained in participatory action research which they used as their tool for entry into the organising of the women. Using data gathered during the research, the women could determine how to approach, assemble and mobilise the women homeworkers in the community, and who should be approached.

Two three-day workshops on participatory action research (PAR) were conducted at the University of the Philippines School for Labor & Industrial Relations (UP-SOLAIR) in collaboration with the Bureau of Rural Workers of the Department of Labor and Employment. During these workshops, the participants were also instructed on how to prepare video documentations. Fifty women homeworkers were trained in participatory research and documentation in two workshops.

The training led to the formulation of a community survey form by a team of KaBaPa officials/leaders and the DOLE-Bureau of Women and Young Workers staff. These surveys were conducted alongside the focussed group discussions (FGDs) in the various project sites where organising was to be done. The FGD is a technique where the women homeworkers assemble in small groups and with the help of a facilitator, they express their ideas and feelings openly but they focus discussions on issues that relate to certain themes/topics such as gender issues, homeworkers' working conditions, homeworkers' needs, methods of and approaches to organising in their respective community and the like. FGDs were conducted in 18 provinces involving some 350 homeworkers. Through the FGDs, data pertinent to organising work were collected and community profiles were made.[3]

In collaboration with the UP Law Center, the KaBaPa-PATAMABA designed a paralegal training and trained twenty homeworker-members of the PATAMABA during the first course on 22 November 1990. Primers for homeworkers were compiled and the Secretary of Labour's paper on the "State of Jurisprudence on Homeworkers" and appropriate sections of the Labour Code were translated into Pilipino, the national language, to ensure that the homeworkers themselves understand the rules.[4]

Creating Legal Awareness

Thirty-five members of KaBaPa and PATAMABA from 11 provinces attended a paralegal orientation and training seminar on 22 - 24 November 1990 sponsored by the University of the Philippines Law Center. The concept and application of paralegal functions was introduced to the community organisers within the context of the homeworkers' campaign.

Organising and Networking

Upon the initiative of the women homeworker-members of the KaBaPa, 29 women homeworkers representing eleven (11) provinces met on 1 October 1989 in the province of Bulacan. Note that this meeting was preceded by the consultative meetings mentioned above. They then formed the national network of homeworkers which was called the *Pambansang Tagapag-ugnay ng mga Manggagawa sa Bahay.*

On 21 October 1989, the PATAMABA ad hoc national coordinating committee met to draft its two-year workplan, January 1990 to December 1991. The work programme included the creation of consciousness raising and training materials to enable the PATAMABA networkers to organise homeworkers in various provinces all over the country. The process of developing training materials was participatory - homeworkers related their living and working conditions; researchers provided data and organisers shared their experiences in organising.

On 1 October 1990, PATAMABA celebrated its first anniversary and held a conference at the UP School of Labour and Industrial Relations during which the Coordinating Committee presented a progress report. By then, PATAMABA already had

amassed some 1,000 members and was organising the subcontractors. In the conference, the homeworkers decided to convene a Congress on Labour Day, 1 May 1991. PATAMABA registered itself with the Securities and Exchange Commission before its national congress in May 1991 which gave it a legal personality as an organisation. The network then spun off from the KaBaPa and now exists as an independent organisation. It also registered itself as a rural organisation with the Bureau of Rural Workers of DOLE.

The PATAMABA functions as an autonomous body though it is still being supported by the KaBaPa until it acquires adequate institutional capacity. It co-chairs the National Steering Committee (NSC), an ad hoc national committee that advocates promotion of homeworkers' welfare and empowerment in the country.

Mechanisms and Manifestations of Empowerment

1. *Awareness Raising*

The conscientising and media campaigns have made the women homeworkers, government authorities and policy makers, the NGO sector and the general public aware of the plight of homebased workers and the exploitation in the putting out system. Through the campaigns, the homeworkers have generated sympathy, enabled the women to call attention to the Department of Labour and launch their advocacy for policy reforms. As a direct result the Labour Department has formulated and promulgated Department Order No. 5 which embodies the implementing rules and regulations of the Labor Code provisions on subcontracting.

Through this mechanism, the push for organising and networking among the homeworkers was reinforced. More women are interested in joining the network.

Outcomes/Manifestations/Indicators

- Consultations, meetings, workshops
- Media campaigns
- Field visits
- Conscientising of the women
- Enabled the women to generate public sympathy; call the attention of government, the Department of Labour in particular and pave the way for policy reforms.

Prior to 1989 when field actions were launched, there were few studies on homeworkers, the homeworkers issues were hardly mentioned in the media, the Department of Labour paid no or little attention to the issue and did not consider it a priority concern. **Homeworkers are invisible no more:**

• Numerous press releases, radio-TV plugs, radio interviews of homeworkers and government officials on homeworking topics.
• For the first time, high labour department officials went to visit homeworkers in some homeworking sites.

2. *Education and Training*

Through this mechanism the women have acquired varied skills: how to organize, how to conduct participatory research, how to plan, how to make proposals, how to network, how to manage microenterprises and the like. Now, there is growing self-confidence among the homeworkers.

This is demonstrated in PATAMABA's spinning off from the KaBaPa, its mother organisation in 1991. With the skills they have learned from the KaBaPa, they are now able to run their organisation and pursue programmes independently. They occasionally seek guidance from the KaBaPa and the Department of Labour as well as other agencies whenever they deem necessary.

The homeworker fellow to the Self-Employed Women's Association in India has given the women ideas, particularly in setting up their own bank in the long run. The women agreed to save from their own pockets to create a seed fund for their future Women's Bank.

With their acquired skills, the women attend meetings and speak up, and no longer hesitate to voice their concerns and their

expectations of government. They come forth with suggestions and solutions.

Outcomes/Manifestations/Indicators

- The women learned skills on how to organise, how to make proposals, how to conduct participatory action research, how to network, how to lobby and advocate, how to manage microenterprises and the like.
- A homeworker was sent as a fellow to observe the workings of the Self-Employed Women's Association in Ahmedabad, India.
- Enabled the women to train other women at the grassroots.
- Enabled the women to prepare community profiles, obtain data they need to prepare for their organising and networking activities.
- Enabled the women to prepare proposals by themselves.
- Gave the women self-confidence in approaching authorities such as government officials and donor agencies to solicit and appeal for aid. **This can be seen as a step towards access to means and resources.**
- Gave the women courage to speak up, tell the authorities about their needs, declare that they have rights as workers.
- Despite limited resources, grassroots women were trained in the various skills using a Training the Trainers' approach.
- Proposals prepared by PATAMABA submitted to ILO and other donors. Grants and donations were obtained from NGOs like the OXFAM, KULU and WAND-DIWATA and private individuals.
- For the first time, a fellowship is awarded to a lowly-educated person. Most fellowships are for those with at least high school education.
- PATAMABA officials drafted a position paper which they read to the Secretary of Labour in the 1989 national workshop; formulated a Declaration of Rights.
- The fellow to SEWA persuaded her homeworker friends and members of PATAMABA to contribute some money every month to generate a seed fund for their future Women Workers' Bank. This is ongoing now.
- PATAMABA spun off from the KaBaPa its mother organisation, in 1991 and organised their second national congress in May 1992 by themselves.

3. *Organising and Networking*

Organising and networking are the major mechanisms for the homeworkers. PATAMABA and the Homeworkers' Center are physical evidences of the collectivisation of the women homeworkers, giving them a collective voice. Their collective strength can be harnessed and mobilised in dealing with employers and middlemen, especially the exploitative ones.

Through the organisation, the homeworkers have gained **political power**. They are able to seek representation in government organisations, public fora, national planning where policies and decisions affecting them are made.

Outcomes/Manifestations/Indicators

- The women met, discussed and consulted one another and agreed to form the national network of homeworkers locally known as the ***Pambansang Tagapag-ugnay ng mga Manggagawa sa Pilipinas*** in October 1989.
- GO-NGO collaboration between the homeworkers'sector was formalised with the creation of the National Steering Committee (NSC) chaired by the Undersecretery of the Department of Labour and co-chaired by the PATAMABA president. KaBaPa and other government agencies are represented in the NSC.
- The Homeworkers' Center, a small rented apartment in Quezon City, was inaugurated in October 1992 and serves

as the national headquarters and office of the PATAMABA.

- Enabled the women to collectivise and reduce their isolation, fragmentation and atomisation. From a small ad hoc group of 29 members that formed the network, there were more than 1,000 women homeworker members in May 1991. By August 1991, there were some 2,000 members.
- Enabled the women homeworkers to gain **political power** and influence the Department of Labour in its policy making and to access to programmes and services government.
- Enabled the women to have a voice and the PATAMABA is represented in many meetings and policy making fora.
- Enabled the women to have a collective vision of how their "future" could be improved.
- Enabled the women to initiate contacts with the officials of the Social Security System to explore how the home-workers could be given social protection
- Enabled the women to access to vital information and through the NSC, contacts with the source of aid and services is facilitated for them.
- **Homeworkers are officially visible and officially recognised.** The PATAMABA has a legal personality since it is registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission as an organisation and as a rural workers' organisation with the Bureau of Rural Workers of the Department of Labour.
- The Labour Department's Bureau of Women and Young Workers conducted a survey on homeworkers. The Bureau of Rural Workers of the same department has assigned a small unit to handle homeworker-related matters.
- Through the National Steering Committee's Research Group and with the help of the Labour Department, the homeworkers are seeking to be included in the labour force survey and to be classified as "workers" and not as mere unpaid family labour as happened in previous years. This is still ongoing and will hopefully eliminate the statistical invisibility of the women.
- A KaBaPa woman member is representing the sector in the updating of the medium term development plan of the country.
- The women homeworkers attend the meetings of the Labour, Income and Employment Statistics inter-agency committee. They also attend meetings like those on Womanhealth, Environment.
- The homeworkers drafted a five-year plan from May 1991 to April 1996, indicative of a **growing sense of efficacy among the women and a continuing hope for reform** and change and ultimately, improvement of their socio-economic situation.

4. *Socio-economic Aid*

Through the organisation, a revolving fund for socio-economic projects has been made available. The homeworker groups in various communities have gotten loans for their microenterprises. The PATAMABA has also solicited 400 US dollars for its members who were victims of the eruption of Mount Pinatubo.

Outcomes/Manifestations/Indicators

- Revolving Funds are made available to support the microenterprises of the women.
- Marketing Assistance
- Product Development
- Enabled the women to **avail of loans at low interest with the least red tape possible.**
- Sixteen economic project proposals were submitted by March 1991. Some of these have been granted loans. For example, the piggery project in Zambales province using a revolving fund, is reportedly working well. The piglets have been returned and additional piglets are being farmed to other homeworker households.
- Twenty five women homeworker /

members of the garments cooperative in one province, Bulacan, were given a grant in early 1989. The money was used to finance the production activities of the cooperative which was formed to "fight subcontractors who exploit garment sewers and to awaken communities on the plight of homeworkers." This project was not too successful in 1989 to 1990. However, the women's group turned it around by investing their remaining funds into rice grain trading.

- The homeworkers have brought samples of their products at the Homeworkers' Center where they have a show nook.
- The homeworkers organised bazaars during the meetings and workshops organised by PATAMABA.
- The number of groups and women availing of the revolving fund is increasing and loans will be further granted in 1993.
- Increases in earnings and incomes of homeworkers is reportedly occuring but there is no hard data at the moment. This will be obtained in 1993.

During the field visits to the project sites, the Evaluation Mission (in March 1991) found an "awareness among homeworkers when it comes to the importance of organising, but with respect to access to resources such as credit and marketing, the awareness among the homeworkers on how to go about it seemed to be limited."

In 1993, the socio-economic projects will be further strengthened by product and marketing consultancies. Access to such services from the government is somewhat difficult because of the limited resources of the agencies concerned. The demand for the service is great but through a special programme to be developed by the PATAMABA, access to such consultancy could be facilitated.

By making economic aid available, the women can hopefully create and make the option of self-employment work in their favor. This should reduce their exploitability and dependence on the middleman.

Summing up and Concluding Remarks

Empowerment can have overt and covert outcomes. For the latter, it can only be cautiously inferred from the actions taken by the women. The indicators of empowerment could be very subtle. For example, by all indications, the women's sense of efficacy has been awakened but this can only be inferred from their actions. Their continuing pursuit, support and commitment to the cause of the PATAMABA is evidence of this. During the inauguration of their Homeworkers' Center in October 1992, Ka Ester Tina, the PATAMABA president tearfully stated: "It is the first time in years that they can ever claim they have an office to come to when they need something or when they have problems and concerns." The tears were of extreme gladness mixed with disbelief. They never thought it could happen.

Empowerment is "enablement" by changing the person, changing structures, replacing or recreating conventional institutions and/or rearranging the environment.

Empowerment transpires over time and usually, it is not instantaneous. As the women homeworkers are empowered they move from silence to articulation, from invisibility to recognition, and from isolation to organisation.

Empowerment means building aspirations, hopes and expectations. Thus empowerment keeps the women going!

Lessons from the field on empowerment

The empowerment process entails building up the women's arsenal of resources - physical, economic, social and psychological. The age-old strategy of minimising or reducing weaknesses and enhancing strengths remains as valid as ever.

Empowerment means giving the women the capacity to give themselves power, even if only psychologically.

Empowerment means giving the women the means enabling the women to avail of vital resources and services.

Empowerment of women is maximised by collectivisation. Hence, organising makes a lot of good sense. Within the context of the organisation, the weakness can be reduced by complementation. Individually, one woman's strength could be the other's weakness and vice-versa. The strengths could be put together and the individual weaknesses plugged via the group or the collective.

In practical terms, women's weaknesses could be plugged by awareness raising, conscientising, organising, education and training.

Women's greatest resources are themselves - their personal capacities including their self-image. To be empowered, women must learn to respect themselves and to regard themselves as capable.

- Improvement of their self image and their self appraisals.
- Increasing their literacy.
- Upgrading their practical skills - technical, management, entrepreneurial, lobbying, advocacy, pressurising, etc.

The Input Side

Personal Capacity Building

Organising
Education and Training
Paralegal Training

Facilitating Access to Social Services and Resources

Availment of Resources and Services
Product Consultancy and Marketing Assistance
Credit Schemes
Revolving Funds

The Output Side

Policy Reform and Advocacy - changes in the public attitudes and government policies
Socio-Economic Upgradation of the Women's Status - changes in the women's skills, incomes, and conditions of work.

The Empowerment Equation

Personal Capacity (Self-esteem, technical skills management skills)	x	**Physical Powerfulness** (capital, facilities)

Explanatory Notes

The *Katipunan ng Bagong Pilipina* (KaBaPa) is a mass-based, activist women's non-government organisation which endeavours to promote male and female equality before the law in all fields where such does not exist; equality of economic rights, non-discrimination in employment opportunities and security of employment after marriage and equality of rights and responsibilities in the family and home. The KaBaPa was launched on March 8, 1975, by some 2,000 women, mostly from rural areas. Today, it claims membership of 28,000 women from all over the country. The organisation has been most active in educating women through its indigenous training system. It has been involved in organising children and youth, the urban poor and market vendors to whom it has extended solidarity during strikes and struggles against eviction.

The KaBaPa has many members who are homeworkers and they are spread out in the provinces. Some of them have been involved in participatory action research on homeworkers since the early 1980s.

Also, it has had substantial involvement in human resource and community development involving rural women and many of its projects are funded with aid from donors. Using its indigenous training system called *gabay*, it has trained more than 20,000 members and non-members as well as 500 trainers. The gabays are guidelines in simple question and answer format to teach women how to organise, how to be a good homemaker and community leader, how to manage projects and the like.

With minimum prodding, the KaBaPa was persuaded to focus on the homeworkers' cause instead of community-based enterprises as such. The path for the homeworkers' project was laid.

The *Katipunan ng Bagong Pilipina* saw itself as an initiator in organising homebased workers, and envisages the homeworkers' organisation developing into an independent body. Realising that organising homeworkers is a gargantuan task, KaBaPa advocates the involvement of and seeks support from non-governmental and governmental organisations. This could be done through a sustained networking process, the main strategy adopted by the KaBaPa in campaigning for the homeworkers' welfare.

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Notes

1. *Subcontractors are those who get job orders from producers or exporters and in turn, they assign the job to others such as the homebased women workers.*

2. *The proceedings are published in the monograph, "Homeworkers of Southeast Asia: The Struggle for Social Protection in the Philippines," 1992: Bangkok, Thailand.*

3. *Homeworking activities in the various provinces are as follows: Isabela, sewing & embroidery; Laguna, sewing paper mache, weaving, making of wooden toys; Bulacan, sewing, embroidery, stitching of sequins & decor onto garments; Nueva Ecija, sewing & broomstick making; Batangas, sewing; Manila, sewing & handicrafts; Pampanga, weaving of tikiw (a local fiber); Quezon, weaving of fans and baskets; Camarines Sur, sewing, hat, bag weaving, crocheting; Tarlac, clay jar making; Pangasinan, bamboo craft; Mandawe City, rattan craft; Bataan, weaving of baetong (another local fiber).*

4. *"Homeworkers of Southeast Asia: The Struggle for Social Protection in the Philippines", 1992.*

WOMEN'S LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT: THE NELLORE EXPERIENCE

Anita Dighe

Understanding Empowerment

The term empowerment has been bandied about so much in recent years that there is now a genuine danger of it being coopted as a 'development buzzword' that will meet the same fate as terms such as 'decentralization', 'people's participation' and the like. Despite this, it is important to understand what the term connotes. After attempting a review of literature, Shetty (1992) comes to the conclusion that empowerment is easy to 'intuit' but complex to define. But while it may be difficult to define it, one is able to understand its meaning when one sees the manifestation of what it implies. Thus an empowered individual would be one who experiences a sense of self-confidence and self-worth; a person who critically analyzes his/her social and political environment; a person who is able to exercise control over decisions that affect his/her life.

These are, however, not the only dimensions or facets that define empowerment. But while recognizing that empowerment is multi-faceted in nature, an attempt is made in this paper to examine how a literacy campaign has brought about women's empowerment. This is done by analyzing the anti-arrack (country liquor) agitation of Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh, which has shown how literacy played a significant role in raising the consciousness of village women so that they have now spearheaded an agitation that is fast engulfing the state of Andhra Pradesh.

In the last section of this paper an attempt is made to define some aspects/dimensions of empowerment as gleaned from the Nellore experience.

Literacy and the Anti-Arrack Agitation in Nellore District

The origin of the agitation can be traced back to the implementation of the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) in the district two years ago. The campaign was officially launched in Nellore from January 1991 after an intensive preparation that lasted for four months. As in most TLC's, in Nellore the district collector was the official organizer and the prime mover of the campaign. Prior to launching the campaign, special efforts were made to elicit active support for the campaign by involving various political parties, bureaucrats of different development departments and organizations/ agencies/individuals representing a cross-section of people. Nellore district, with a literacy rate of 49% (national average 52.1% and state average 45.1%), had 450,000 non-literates in the 9-35 age group.

At the district level, the Collector, with a team of dedicated workers, constituted committees such as an academic committee to provide resource support to the campaign, and a cultural committee to use varied cultural forms such as song, drama, street plays, to convey to the non-literates the importance and the need for literacy.

In order to generate sufficient enthusiasm for literacy, wall writing, pamphleteering and even *padyatras* or processions were carried out. As the main purpose of the campaign was to enthuse not just the non-literates but also literates who were expected to become volunteers, *kalajathas* or cultural troupes were formed. A large number of these artists who came from the rural areas toured extensively in the district giving about 7,000 performances in an idiom and language that was understood by the village folk. The themes of the plays and songs involved problems encountered in life because of illiteracy - exploitation of labour, low wages, untouchability, powerlessness, inability to deal with social evils such as dowry, alcoholism, wife beating etc. The ideological content of the songs and

plays underscored the importance of a people's movement for fighting illiteracy and of the relevance of literacy in understanding the nature of exploitation. Usually after the conclusion of a *kalajatha* a call was given inviting volunteers to take up literacy work. Those who volunteered were asked to take an oath in the presence of the audience to work for the cause of literacy. The method became so popular that about 55,000 volunteers registered their names when the need was only for 40,000 (Shatrugna, 1992).

After creating a favourable climate for the campaign, a three-tiered training programme ensured that training of the functionaries at various levels was carried out. The literacy classes were started thereafter and an attempt was made by the volunteers to complete each of the three levels of literacy primers that were prepared for the campaign. That women's participation was high is borne out by the fact that of the 150,000 who completed the first phase of the campaign successfully, 100,000 were women. Most of them belonged to the Scheduled Castes and backward classes (Shatrugna, 1992).

As the main purpose of the campaign was not only gaining literacy skills but also development and empowerment, the post-literacy phase consisted of formation of *Jana Chetana Kendras* (Centres for People's Awareness) where the problems facing the villagers were discussed. The overall experience was that these kendras numbering 6000, were very popular with women taking a leading role in their functioning. As the women came together at the centres, they not only discussed the general problems faced by the village, but also shared their experiences and problems with one another.

The origin of the anti-arrack agitation was due to various factors. The role played by the CPI(Communist Party of India)-(ML) groups in bringing opposition to the arrack business on to the national agenda cannot be ignored. In the earlier phase of the work of the CPI (ML) groups (mainly in the Telegana districts), the focus was on reduction in the retail price of arrack. Subsequently, these groups took up the struggle to stop the arrack auctions and prevent the sale of arrack in the villages. In this effort, they received tremendous support from women who suffered daily at the hands of their inebriated husbands. But this effort of the CPI (ML) groups was 'top-down' - women's participation was elicited but they were not involved in the planning and decision-making processes. In other words, the initiative did not come from the women themselves.

What spurred the agitation was a small incident that took place in Doobagunta village in Nellore district. In this village, the women of the village stopped the vending of arrack after two men of the village had died after a bout of drinking. This incident had been preceded by a lot of discussion among the villagers (especially women) about the evils of excessive drinking. These discussions focused on how in many families the men drank all they earned and how women had to work and run the houshold on their earnings and get beaten daily in the bargain by their drunken husbands. The volunteers of Jana Vigyan Vedika organized by the CPI (M) cadre had played an important role in generating this consciousness (Balagopal, 1992).

In the post-literacy primer called *Chaduvu Velugu* (light of knowledge), the Doobagunta example was cited in the form of a lesson titled *Adavallu Ekamaithe* (if women unite). The text of the lesson was a story that was written from the perspective of women of Doobagunta village - of the harassment they had suffered at the hands of their drunken husbands, of the manner in which they had discussed their problems in the literacy class, of their resolve to take collective action and of the success they had achieved by closing down the arrack shop in the village. The narration in the text was simple, direct and ended with an exhortation to the reader that if they (the women of Doobagunta) could do it, "why can't you too do it?" Think .....".

As the primer with this lesson was introduced in the post- literacy centres, it had an electrifying impact on women. In several villages, women's committees were formed and citing the Doobagunta example, agitation against the sale of arrack began. First the husbands, sons and male relatives habituated to liquor were advised not to drink. As the women realized that as long as the arrack

shop in the village was open, it would be impossible to prevent men from drinking, they issued a warning to the arrack shop owners to close down the shops. Due to the pressure from women's groups, arrack shops were closed either with the consent of the owner, or by force. Women formed squads in the villages and a vigil was kept round the clock to ensure that no arrack entered the village either through the arrack contractor or the excise department.

By August 1992, the anti-arrack agitation had spread through the villages of Nellore district. August is the month in which excise auctions are held and on August 11, the date fixed by the collector of Nellore for auction, there was a major demontration of women at the collector's office, forcing the auction to be postponed. Subsequently, the auction would be announced but would get postponed each time due to massive mobilization of women. Gradually, all the opposition parties, voluntary organizations, women's groups, civil liberties organizations joined the protest movement so that by the end of November 1992, the anti-arrack agitation had spread to a large number of districts of Andhra Pradesh.

But the success of the anti-arrack agitation suffered a setback when in December, 1992 the Chief Minister of Andra Pradesh branded such work as 'anti-government' and announced that strict action would be taken against those government functionaries who supported the movement and worked actively for it.

Women, Literacy and Empowerment - An Analysis of the Nellore Experience

From the Nellore experience, one can begin to develop a broad conceptual framework of what empowerment means.

1. *Empowerment and Marginalized Groups*

The term empowerment is focused on marginalized groups - the landless, the powerless, the voiceless. In Nellore, it was the scheduled castes, and other backward caste women who took up the arrack issue and who as a result, have spearheaded an agitation that has now elicited support from middle class women and men. The anti-arrack agitation has become such a powerful women's movement and has taken such deep roots in the Andhra countryside that the yearly arrack sales have now been postponed indefinitely in Nellore district and in some other parts of Andhra Pradesh.

2. *The Process-oriented Nature of Empowerment*

It is clear from the Nellore experience that empowerment is not an end-of-project product or a state that can be attained within defined time-frames. Instead, empowerment is a dynamic and on-going process which can only be located on a continuum (Shetty, 1992). The total literacy campaign in Nellore had given an opportunity to women to acquire literacy skills, and as a result, to begin to feel sufficiently self-confident to function as autonomous individuals. But if acquisition of literacy became the essential step in empowering then at the individual level, the issue of arrack provided the necessary spark that united them at the collective level. If empowerment is viewed as a continuum, empowerment at the group level is essential but this cannot be brought about without empowerment at the individual level.

3. *The Holistic Nature of Empowerment*

Empowerment cannot be constrained by a sectoral approach. Nor can it be related to just a set of activities or inputs. Empowerment is an all-encompassing term in which a whole range of economic, social and political activities, including group organisation, agriculture and income generation projects, education, integrated health care and so on, would work synergistically towards the common goal of empowering the poor (Bhasin, 1985). In Nellore, the arrack issue was the only issue on which the women's movement was built. This was a conscious decision taken by the women themselves. But as arrack shops were closed and the men saved money for running the household, the impact of a slightly better

diet on their health was immediately discernible. The debilitating effect of arrack on the health of the menfolk, and the consequent effect on their productivity, became an issue of great interest to both men and women.

4. *Empowerment Deals with 'Strategic' rather than 'Practical Gender Interests'*

It is important to differentiate between what Molyneux (1981) terms 'the practical gender interests' and 'the strategic gender interests'. She notes that the former are short term and linked to immediate needs arising from women's current responsibilities vis-a-vis the livelihood of their families and children, while the latter address bigger issues such as sexual division of labour within the home, the removal of institutionalized forms of gender discrimination, the establishment of political equality, freedom of choice over child-bearing, and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women.

It appears from the Nellore experience that to begin with, the agitation addressed the 'practical gender interests' in so far as its genesis was due to the rural women's concern about their husbands' callous indifference to their responsibilities towards the family and to the upbringing of their children. But as the agitation picked up momentum, it appeared that it had the potential to address the 'strategic gender interests', although the women from Nellore have strategically decided to focus exclusively on the arrack issue for the present. This was made apparent from the discussions with village women in some villages during which it was categorically stated that they would first win the battle against arrack before taking up any other issue. But interestingly, power relationships between men and women within the family and outside are slowly beginning to change. Women have formed anti-arrack vigilance squads in the village to ensure that illicit arrack is not smuggled into the village. There have been instances when the women have successfully challenged the bureaucracy, the police, and the politicians. But to what extent the anti-arrack agitation would be able to sustain itself, consolidate its gains and move on the other issues of concern to women is now uncertain due to the present policy of the state government, which has cracked down severely on those functionaries who support the agitation.

5. *Empowerment has Cognitive, Psychological and Economic Components*

According to Stromquist (1988), empowerment is a socio-political concept that goes beyond 'participation', and 'consciousness-raising'. She calls for a fuller definition of empowerment that considers cognitive, psychological and economic components. The cognitive component refers to women's understanding of their conditions of subordination and the reasons that create such conditions. The psychological component includes the development of a feeling that women can improve their condition and the belief that they can succeed in their efforts. In Nellore, as women have collectively picketed the arrack shops, marched unitedly to the district collector's office and organized a *dharna* to ensure that auctions are not allowed to take place, they have become strengthened in their conviction that it is only such united action that can bring about any change. "Now that we have come out of our homes, we will fight to the very end" is the refrain that has been echoed in village after village.

But the third component, namely the economic, has not been addressed in Nellore so far. This component of empowerment signifies that women are able to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of financial independence, however small and burdensome in the beginning. Such income-generating activities, however, are difficult to implement because they are risky, time-consuming and hard to sustain.

6. *Democratizing Aspect of Empowerment*

A key feature of empowerment is that it elicits the widest possible community participation and is, in that sense, democratizing (Shetty, 1992). This aspect of the Nellore experience is important for the

agitation has mobilized support not only from certain sections of village women but also from certain sections of village men. Alongside various women's groups, political parties, unions of lawyers, doctors, etc., have lent support to the agitation. An interesting development has been that the village women took a conscious decision not to identify leaders for their agitation. It is said that their argument was that once leaders were identified, they would be 'bought' over by the politicians.

7. *Understanding the Nature of Literacy that Empowers*

Conceptually it is important to distinguish between literacy that empowers and literacy which domesticates. Traditionally, literacy programmes have focused on acquisition of technical skills of reading and writing. While the importance of acquisition of literacy skills should not be discounted, the fact remains that in the case of women, such a literacy oftentimes merely reinforces their domestic role and does not bring about any change in social relations either within the family or outside. Literacy that empowers, on the other hand, seeks to combine both consciousness-raising and participation so that women not only understand the causes of their oppression but also take steps to ameliorate their conditions. In Nellore, it seems that in the basic literacy skills, the emphasis was on acquisition. It was, however, in the post-literacy phase that 'awareness-raising' around issues of common concern, started taking place in a systematic manner. Consciousness-raising or the development of a critical view of the micro and macro reality of individuals, is a major contribution of Paulo Freire. The events at the Doobagunta village of Nellore district were probably precipitated because of the discussions that had taken place at the post-literacy centres on the evils of excessive drinking. More importantly, it was the manner in which the Doobagunta incident was converted into a lesson in the post-literacy primer that has pedagogical relevance. The lesson in the form of a story was direct, simple and written from the perspective of the women of Doobagunta. The other lessons in the primer dealt with issues of poverty, landlessness, minimum wages, problems with the ration shop, health services and such other day-to-day problems of the poor. This primer evoked tremendous interest among the neo-literates.

The role of literacy in the overall process of empowerment, however, needs to be understood. Is literacy a necesary pre-condition for empowerment? That this is not necessarily so is borne out by the experience of the Women's Development Programme (WDP) in Rajasthan and of *Mahila Samakhya* in three other states of India. This experience has shown that even though non-literate women can become empowered, the demand for literacy does get articulated by them after some time. Literacy is then perceived not as an end in itself but as a means to enable women to have better control over their lives. Literacy becomes empowering if it enables women to gain access to the storehouse of information and knowledge that has been denied to them. But literacy skills have to be constantly honed so that as new vistas open up to women, the desire to continue beyond basic literacy becomes a felt need. In this process, literacy can also become a vehicle for creative self-expression so that stories, songs and poems are written by women themselves.

8. *Context-specific Nature of Empowerment*

According to Shetty (1992), empowerment can be defined only within the local social, cultural, economic, political, and historical context. Even with regard to the anti-arrack agitation, it is important to understand the contextual factors that precipitated the agitation. For ten years, the importance of the arrack has increased steadily in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Arrack consists principally of rectified spirit which is obtained by distilling fermented molasses. Over the years, despite the change in government, arrack has become an important source of excise revenue for the State Government. This has increased steadily from Rs. 39 crore in 1970-71 to Rs. 812 crore in 1991-92. This increase has not been an innocuous increase caused by changing

life styles and habits but the consequence of a deliberate policy pursued by the government (Balagopal, 1992). Unwilling to collect the taxes it imposes on the urban rich and unwilling to touch the rural rich, the government has increasingly turned to liquor sales as a major source of revenue. This brazenness on the part of the government has resulted in the setting up of more and more arrack shops in the villages and in the literal bringing of arrack to the doorsteps of the villagers with, at the same time, increases in the retail price from year to year.

The manufacture of arrack is the monopoly of the government distilleries but its sole selling rights are auctioned areawise to contractors. That arrack is an extremely lucrative enterprise is evident from the fact that over the years arrack contractors have amassed great wealth and have started wielding political influence.

It is against this background that the anti-arrack agitation has to be understood. For at one level there is the political role of arrack and the difficulty of fighting it, a difficulty that was not immediately apparent to the thousands of rural women who took up what they perceived to be a just struggle. Their anguish and sense of outrage was evident when they joined the agitation and posed the following questions: "We do not have drinking water, no work, no schools, for our children and our wages are low. Nothing is available here except arrack. It is the only thing that comes to the village regularly, uninterruptedly. Why is the government so interested in supplying only arrack so religiously? Why does it not stop the supply? We will now fight to stop arrack from entering our village".

9. *Sustainability is an Important Aspect of Empowerment*

The direction of empowerment is that of self-reliance and withdrawal of external agents wherever the initial impetus has come from outside. Grassroots organisations, an integral part of most empowerment strategies, are thus seen as critical elements in ensuring sustainability. But the total literacy campaigns are funded by the Government. That being so, the questions to be asked are: "What is the extent of empowerment that would be acceptable? What is the 'space' that would be provided by a government-funded programme?" That the 'space' provided was not very much has now become evident from the fact that the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh has expressed his anger at the manner in which certain district collectors, while implementing the literacy programme, had raised 'anti-government' sentiment among the learners through the literacy primers. While ordering that such provocative lessons be expunged from the literacy primers, the Chief Minister has also ordered that government functionaries should dissociate themselves from the agitation. That the state might even resort to repressive measures is becoming a distinct possibility because of the political nature of the agitation.

On the other hand, the women's movement is gradually becoming more militant and has now become politicized because of the support it has received from all the opposition political parties. Given this conflicting scenario, the future direction of the anti-arrack agitation remains uncertain. But despite this uncertainty, there is a hope that 'the women cadres and leaders emerging from this movement will pose serious questions in future. The question that the grassroots women pose to husbands, activists and parties - to the entire civil society - will be radically different from the ones that the urban middle class women have posed so far" (Ilaiah, 1992).

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THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES MULTINATIONAL PROJECT ON EDUCATION AND WORK: AN EXPERIENCE OF POPULAR EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN COLOMBIA

Miryan Zúñiga E.

This paper presents two Colombian adult education programmes with women, developed in the context of the Organization of American States (OAS) multinational project on Education and Work (OAS/PMET project). The analysis of these programmes points out the convergence of the principles and practices of popular education, which inspires the programmes, and the process of women's empowerment. In this direction, it suggests that indicators of empowerment could be drawn up from the main postulates of popular education.

The OAS Multinational Project of Education and Work

In 1989 the OAS decided to set up a Multinational Project on Education and Work, for the period 1990-1996, with the participation of all Latin American Countries.

This project was based on the following considerations:

- In spite of the annual economic growth of 6% experienced by Latin American countries, there are deep structural imbalances which generate conditions of poverty, marginality and unemployment.
- Incomes in Latin America fell down between 22% and 23% in the period 1980-1988.
- The high rates of unemployment in the region, were a challenge to the development strategies of Latin American countries.

Given these conditions the OAS/PMET project attempts:

1. To conceptualize the relationship between education and work more broadly, in order to set forth work as something more than employment, as a fundamental activity of human beings with social and cultural determinants. That is, relating quality of education with the needs, resources and aspirations of the population.
2. To link the design of the project not only to training for employment, but also to the development of an entrepreneurial culture which gives rise to cooperatives and microenterprises.
3. To transform all curricula, in order to organize educational contents to facilitate the overcoming of the daily problems of life, in which work is a fundamental space of cultural and social development.
4. To promote the full realization of the human potential, facilitating individual and community participation in the design, development and evaluation of the educational programmes.
5. To give priority to peasants, ethnic minorities, women and unemployed youngsters.

The OAS/PMET Project in Colombia

Colombia decided to develop the OAS/PMET project at the level of Adult Education in view of its new focus on this type of education.

Since 1988 the government has attempted to orient adult education programmes according to the principles and

practices of popular education. That is, to design programmes with the people, following their needs and interests; to design these programmes to promote organization of the popular sectors of society, in order to empower them to control their own development; to develop a dialogical pedagogy, which recognizes the traditional knowledge and culture of the people; to promote direct democratic processes, in order to eliminate inequalities and to establish harmonious relationships with nature and among peoples; to consider literacy and adult education as involving more than the technical skills of reading and writing as they also concern learning to manage one's day to day life.

Since 1990, the Colombian government has set up 44 community-managed Centers of Popular Adult Education (CAEPA) where organized communities develop programmes and projects to meet their learning needs.

The OAS/PMET project was established in the context of three of these centers, located in 3 different cities: Cali, Zarzal and Villavicencio.

These programmes were designed through workshops with the students, the CAEPA Coordinating Committee, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), representatives of governmental institutions and participants from the Universidad Del Valle. The result was a participatory curriculum design of the PMET programme. The Community of the Cali Center decided to set up the programme for young and adult women who wanted to be trained to establish productive enterprises. This programme is carried out by CER-MUJER, a women's NGO. The Zarzal and Villavicencio programmes gathered men and women. However, in Zarzal a group of women, community mothers, were selected to contribute to a master's degree project conducted by a graduate student of the Valley Universities.[1]

All three programmes have in common three elements:

1. An integral curriculum structure, which includes the following components: *technical* (to develop knowledge and skills for production), *entrepreneurial* (to develop knowledge and skills for marketing), *cultural* (to promote cultural identity and assertiveness), *communal* (to insert the programme in a process of local development), and a component aiming to promote gender awareness.

2. A pedagogical approach which starts setting up the practical experience of a production group and continues with the systematization of knowledge. Thus, it goes from practice to theory.

3. A final purpose: to generate production groups which take into account cultural and community dynamics.

The Cali programme

This includes a 5th curriculum component, dedicated to generating gender awareness among women participants. This component includes workshops about identity; self-esteem; women and family; women and work; women, health and self-care; relationships between men and women; sexuality and values, etc.

It also includes the celebration of events, such as Mother's Day, Women's Day and the Non-Violence against Women Day.

This programme assumes that women have three roles to play in society; the *reproductive* role, which relegates women to the private, domestic arena, where they are mothers and wives; the *productive* role, which places women in economic production; and the *community management* role, which is related with women's participation in local affairs. Therefore, the programme attempts to empower these women, to accomplish all three roles in order to break up the structure which sustains women's subordination, and to increase women's self-confidence and internal force.

So far, the Cali programme has made possible the formation of four production groups: hand-made cards, fruit pulp, clothing, and marketing of different products.

The Zarzal programme

This attempts to further advance the San Lorenzo Project of FUNDALCO, a

Colombian NGO, with women (Zúñiga 1992).

It operationalizes the concept of *sustained health* through a process of group production of food, cooking practices and learning about nutrition as a source of health, the development of gender identity and self-esteem, and cultural community traits of their locality.

The pedagogical model of this programme is based on a dialogue of knowledge: the traditional knowledge of the women participants (that is, their experience and world view, which provides them with ways of interpreting their lives), and the systematic knowledge of the coordinators of the programme (a nurse, a teacher, and an expert in agriculture).

The dialogue flows around the kitchen, the physical setting where these women spend most of their time, and therefore the space where they feel most comfortable. These women bring to the kitchen, where the workshops are carried on, the products they grow (vegetables and small animals such as rabbits and hens). They cook a meal and learn about its nutritional value, recognizing the needs of the human body. Then they talk about cultural practices, about the feeding of men, women and children, as well as about the traditional role and potentialities of women in the family, the economy and the community.

It is expected as a result of this programme, that these women's children will be better nourished and that these women will increase their self-esteem, as compared with the control group.

Popular Education and Women's Empowerment

According to Caroline Moser (1992) there are four approaches to the planning of gender in the Third World:

1. The *well-being approach*, which develops programmes to provide goods to women of low incomes, because they are in charge of their families, thus helping women to help their families. This type of programme only recognizes and reinforces the reproductive role of women.

2. The *equity approach*, which promotes the reduction of discrimination against women, through policies and programmes which recognize the productive role of women in society.

3. The *anti-poverty* approach, which assumes that women's poverty is caused by their lack of land, capital, training and employment. Thus, it promotes programmes which enable women to generate income to overcome poverty .

4. The *empowerment* approach, which recognizes that the concept of gender is a sociocultural construct and points out the social relation between men and women, in which women have been systematically subordinated.

Among the four approaches, it is the empowerment approach which recognizes the triple role of women in the family, economic production and the community, and recommends challenging the social structure and oppressive situation women have to suffer. Women have to increase their power not in terms of domination over others, but in terms of gains over their self-esteem and internal force. This means women have the right to decide about their own life and to influence social change, through their ability to gain control over crucial natural and cultural resources.

This approach is not interested in the "integration" of women in society, but in the design of a new society, where relationships between men and women are more democratic. To achieve this, it is necessary to promote organizations to accomplish legal changes, political mobilization and social consciousness.

This last approach coincides with the main postulates of popular education. According to Sime (1991), between 1970 and 1990 a paradigm of popular education was drawn up with the following perspectives:

Political: it searches for a democratic society through the full participation of all people in social life regardless of their race, social status and gender. It also looks forward for people to achieve peace, tolerance and solidarity. It promotes the empowerment of minority groups, popular and marginal sectors of society, and women to be able to influence social and political decisions.

Cultural: it questions to what extent to preserve the traditional, how to relate the traditional and the modern, how to manage the racism and patriarchalism of popular groups, and how to value the plural ethnicity of many countries.

Pedagogical: it questions the authoritarian relations of teachers over students. It recognizes the traditional knowledge of people, promotes assertiveness among participants and encourages multiple ways of knowing. It does not prioritize the group above the individual, or the rational over the affective.

Ethical: it seeks congruence between means and ends. It stands for human rights, the claims of women, and against exploitation of children, injustice and corruption.

Thus, the paradigm of popular education could become an agency to promote women's empowerment. In fact, the political, cultural, pedagogical and ethical perspectives of popular education, show a way to draw a system of indicators to evaluate the extent to which a programme, like the OAS of Cali and Zarzal, is helping women to become empowered.

These indicators could be identified according to the four perspectives of popular education, but they must include what Stromquist (1993) calls the cognitive, psychological, political and economic components of empowerment. These components are related to the understanding of women's condition of subordination (cognitive); the development of feelings that women can act upon to improve their conditions (psychological); the ability to organize and mobilize for social changes (political); and the skills to obtain some degree of financial autonomy (economic).

The following set of indicators could have the potential to evaluate the process of empowerment in all of its components.

1. *Political perspective*

Indicator: The establishment of women's production groups and associations

Cognitive component: the understanding of traditional concepts about the location of women in the private sphere of their households.

Psychological component: the development of feelings that women could have achievements in the public sphere of society.

Economic component : the development of managerial skills to achieve financial autonomy.

Political component: the ability to promote organizations to reshape relations in the public sphere of society.

2. *Cultural perspective*

Indicator: The use of legal offices for women and family affairs

Cognitive component: Knowledge about women's rights.

Psychological component: Confidence in women's ability to carry on legal processes to plead for their rights, even against cultural traditions.

Economic component: Ability to find resources to carry on law suits to improve their social and economic conditions.

Political component: Ability to improve the establishment of social

institutions which support women's work towards social change in the field of gender relations.

3. *Ethical perspective*

Indicator: Promotion of legislation about abortion, violence against women, inheritance, and competency to control business

Cognitive component: Knowledge about the moral values of society.

Psychological component: Confidence in women's ability to make decisions about moral and business issues.

Economic component : Ability to exercise advocacy for issues which assure women's autonomy.

Political component: Ability to participate in actions to promote changes in the traditional gender relations.

4. *Pedagogical perspective*

Indicator: Participation in the design, development and evaluation of educational programmes for women

Cognitive component: Understanding the traditional conditions of women and their development possibilities.

Psychological component: Belief in women's ability to share the responsibility for implementing a programme.

Economic component: Ability to develop skills to achieve economic autonomy through the educational programme.

Political component: Ability to develop skills to find terms of agreement about how the programme could be set up.

According to these indicators, the OAS multinational projecy on Education and Work held in Cali and Zarzal (Colombia) has empowered some women to act upon their local political, cultural, ethical and pedagogical forces in order to change their life.

In fact, this project has enabled the women to gain insights into their traditional subordinate condition as well as into their inner strength to change such a situation. Both groups of women have been able to organize small businesses to generate income, to gain self-confidence to make economic decisions, to gain skills to negotiate about the sharing of domestic work, to develop managerial skills to participate in community programmes, and to support their ideas in public meetings.

This experience points out the relationship between popular education programmes and empowerment. But it also suggests a hypothesis about the relationship between women's access to paid work and the process of empowerment. There is, however, a need to distinguish the kinds of work that have more potential for empowerment. This is the challenge the OAS project faces.

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Note

1. *Ms Olga Osorio, a member of the PMET project. (cf. Osorio, Olga. A. (1992) Master's Project. Cali. Universidad del Valle.)*

EDUCATE TO EMPOWER: AN ASIAN EXPERIENCE

Namtip Aksornkool

Introduction

Over the past decade, education for women's empowerment has been intensively discussed. The reason lies in the disappointment over the "run-of-the-mill" literacy programmes. They are described as unsatisfactory and limited to the three R's, a handful of income-raising skills and certain "life quality" components.

These programmes center on areas predetermined by women's reproductive function to the exclusion of their equally important role as economic producers. The programmes often leave women disillusioned as they quickly realize that the programmes do not help improve their lives.

Despite such programmes, learners continue to face economic hardship, double responsibility and overall social inequality.

Training for better productivity does not suffice because women need decision-making capacity and ability to organize and take part in community and national activities.

Advocates of education for empowerment have argued that education needs to go well beyond mere "enabling". It has to view women as society's active members who need education to participate, effectively and meaningfully, in any activity and as equal partners of men.

Definitions of empowerment vary but Paz is most succinct - it is "the ability to direct and control one's own life" (Paz, 1990). The report of the 1991 Seminar on the integration of women in development elaborates that it is a "process in which women gain control over their own lives of knowing and claiming their rights at all levels of society at the international, local and household levels. Self-empowerment means that women gain autonomy, are able to set their own agenda and are fully involved in economic, political and social decision-making processes" (Depthnews, 1992).

Empowerment is better defined as a concept than in practical terms, which leaves many questions unanswered. This is particularly true with education for empowerment. How does one educate to empower? How does learning for empowerment differ from other programmes for women? How should learning be structured? How can its impact be measured?

This paper discusses the training programme which is part of the UNDP funded project "Expansion of Skills-based Literacy Programme of Women", better known as Educate to Empower from the title of the manual it produced. The project represents an effort to answer some of the above questions. The paper also raises some other questions related to education for women's empowerment.

The Training Programme

The experience of the training programme to be discussed arose from a series of regional training workshops. Four of the workshops produced curricula and learning materials. The others designed reading materials for women with limited reading skills.

In the first group, three workshops were run by UNESCO and funded by the UNDP as part of its project RAS/88/013, Expansion of Skills-based Literacy Programmes for Women. The fourth was financed by ESCAP and UNICEF with technical support from UNESCO-PROAP. The second group is part of UNESCO's regular programme.

Five workshops were held between July 1990 and July 1992, with 20-25 participants in each. Fourteen countries of Asia and the

Pacific were represented: Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Laos, India, Japan, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.

All countries share a common characteristic. Their women are unable to give their best to the national development.

The resulting curricula and materials help prepare women for self-development as active members of their family, community and nation. They seek overall personal development and account for the notorious double responsibility that women shoulder as economic producers and as mothers and wives.

The above approach concentrates on imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes that help women operate as efficient and equal partners of men. It is important to stress collaboration between the sexes and to make sure that empowerment does not mean "pitting women against men".

Outcome of the regional workshops

1. The profile of the empowered woman.
2. A manual to train in preparing programmes for empowerment.
3. 70 curricular units complete with teaching guides, learner workbooks, posters, flipcharts, booklet etc.
4. 29 picture books for women with limited reading skills.
5. The training experience gained throughout the workshops is their invisible "benefit". The work will reach its highest point when ex-participants proceed to invest their experience in their own workshops at the national/subnational levels and build on whatever they learned.

Major Components of Training

1. *Gender Issues*

Participants spell out and explain their long-held values concerning the respective roles of women and men. It is a summary of the traditional view: areas of work assigned to men and women; distribution of access to resources and their control; access to and respective ways of earning and spending.

Gender issues are handled with care since they involve questioning one's own attitudes, values and beliefs, frequently the very essence of one's existence. Activities are planned to ensure that all opinions are respected. In this way, participants become open to reconsidering their values.

The nature of the activities also plays an important role in creating a non-threatening climate. Group work in which peer support is clearly present is reassuring. Well-timed questions from peers also help participants entertain new views without feeling pressured into accepting them.

Training materials are more varied, interesting and appealing than usual as they are to induce new attitudes. Audio-visuals are most effective for the purpose because they present cases in which participants recognize their shortcomings without being directly challenged.

The video, *The Impossible Dream*, produced by the United Nations' Information Office, and UNFPA's video, *Women - Key to the Future*, are two examples of effective training tools. Participants also enjoy video films produced by various countries in the region. These videos are used with discussion guidelines. Sometimes, editing is necessary to bring the contents of the video to the point.

Other exercises, such as drawing and the Agree/Disagree game, lead groups to reflect on their beliefs, are fun, and reveal a lot without threatening anyone. Peer pressure is another means to cause an individual to re-examine her ways, consider new options, and adopt or reject them.

Groups have come up with exercise models that intensify the scrutiny of gender issues by assigning a framework of action. In one case they suggest assigning their future learners to write short dialogues for well-known male and female cartoon characters caught in expressive scenes of conflict, debate, or reconciliation.

Workshops have revealed that enlightened male participants exert enormous influence on the traditional gender perceptions of other participants.

In contrast to other skills, the ability to change gender attitudes takes more time to develop and must be continuously reinforced. Gender issues are therefore interwoven with other activities for a more comprehensive and facile treatment of the new concepts.

Before participants embark on preparing their own individual curricular units (or learning programmes), they develop their own "Profile of the Empowered Woman". (For the latest version of the profile, see below.)

2. *Work Skills*

Work was the major focus throughout the training programme as it imparts integrity and a sense of belonging.

Experience in the region and elsewhere shows that educational programmes for women often fail because they do not include training women in lucrative skills (Dighe 1989). Sewing, embroidery, tailoring, and handicrafts alone cannot sustain women's interest for long because they are not earning them much income (Lind and Foss 1990).

The programme has shifted to emphasize skills that women want and need to know. Most popular among these are agricultural skills, as confirmed by the needs analysis conducted prior to the training.

Examples of topics selected by participants are: planting apple trees (Bhutan), making century eggs for sale (China), integrated farming (Laos), rice planting (Viet Nam), selling dried fish (Myanmar), raising pigs (Viet Nam and Papua New Guinea), food catering (Papua New Guinea) and brick-making (Thailand).

Enhancing women's productive skills without lessening their other responsibilities has overburdened women. Several curricular materials dwell on promoting sharing of household responsibility between husband and wife and other family members.

Although some work skills belong in the "feminine" category, the curricular units go well beyond the mere "enabling" functions.

The new subjects on the learning list include planning, management and entrepreneurial habits. They are helpful in any work area. Building up positive self-image and strengthening of women's self-confidence also receives due attention.

In addition, the workshops emphasized that, at present, in many countries "unfeminine" skills are necessary for women to cope effectively. Among them the use of technology, particularly in farming tasks, such as water-powered units for rice pounding, plumbing and water pump maintenance, and heating.

3. *Literacy and Numeracy*

The workshops promoted combined treatment of gender issues, work skills, and the three R's through exercises that ask future teachers to employ terms and concepts common to all of the above. If the skills are joined into the fabric, the real-life relevance of one reinforces that of the other. However, old habits die hard. From time to time, in a bizarre way, learners insist on using words with functional content such as "groups", "loans", "credits", and "organization" in odd combinations with words like "cupboard" or "chair". Another problem consists in linking numeracy skills to other skills in meaningful ways.

Contents

The attributes outlined below in the "Profile of the Empowered Woman" and the detailed needs analysis of the target population are two important bases on which content selection is made. The profile is important because it brings into the picture the qualities desired in women learners.

The Profile of the Empowered Woman

The empowered woman appreciates the time she spends on domestic work and outside the home. She is aware that overwork is harmful to her physical and mental condition and that health is vital. She is able to question her double responsibility and seeks help from others to have enough leisure to spend on learning and participating in the social and political life of the community.

The empowered woman appreciates the value of her contribution whether remunerated or not. She is aware that she has tremendous potential to contribute to the progress of her family, community and nation. With that understanding, she is confident of her worth, is open-minded and can appreciate others.

Aware of her productivity, she seeks to improve her skills and knowledge continuously. She has enough information sources (such as extension services, available and relevant technology) and makes sure she benefits from them. She appreciates the knowledge gained from reading and reads regularly.

The empowered woman understands that she is a human being and can control her own life. Hence, she could and should question the family and social practices which negatively affect her. She seeks to get scientific insights into superstitions, and challenges those which are unjust to women.

She has freedom of movement and expression on a par with men. She appreciates her strengths and weaknesses and seeks self-improvement.

She can lead and serve as a positive role model for other women.

The empowered woman is aware of her rights as a citizen and protects them actively. She is convinced of her equality with men. She knows which laws and legal processes treat women unfairly and seeks to use her legal knowledge to protect her own and other women's rights.

The empowered woman respects herself and dares take credit and responsibility for her contribution and action. She looks for options and makes informed decisions. She dares to be different and creative.

The empowered woman appreciates and supports other women. She is aware that organization means strength and seeks to strengthen her organizational, management and leadership skills.

The empowered woman is aware that her health is related to the number of children she has. She respects the dignity of womanhood and appreciates daughters in the same way she does sons.

The empowered woman nurtures herself. She wants everybody to understand that, as a human being, she is entitled to happiness in the same way that others are.

She has a zest for life.

The training manual, *Educate to Empower*, attempts to translate one or more of the above desirable attributes into learning content of the curricular units or reading materials.

Content Presentation

The debate on the desirable qualities of the empowered woman centers on competence, proficiency and behavior attributes. It also spells out an implicit scenario in which the woman sheds the yoke of the numerous social, cultural and economic roles.

It is possible that in a few countries, a small number of women may possess these qualities. However, these women remain a small minority in any country -- so widespread, cross-nationally, are the constraints to emancipation.

Educate to Empower attaches equal importance to the productive and reproductive functions of the woman. Emphasis on one to the exclusion of the other either prevents women from being economically active or saddles them with additional and burdensome responsibilities. Programmes developers must ensure that the contents of a programme help women raise their awareness regarding their conditions and question the asymmetrical relations within the household and society.

In the final analysis, all the knowledge, skills or attitudes promoted by a programme must be useful in providing learners with knowledge, skills and attitudes which equip them to take actions for changes which will improve their status in society and lead to their emancipation.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring is done informally. Visits to focal point and traget populations offer better insights into the project realities and give an idea of improvements required and lessons learned. Informal discussion and contact with life in target areas, along with the analysis of curricular materials, help make them realistic

and relevant. This reflects the quality of the national training which, in turn, echoes the degree of effectiveness of the regional training.

PROAP questionnaires went regularly to all participating countries to assess the pace of progress and provide timely assistance to implementing agencies.

Monitoring of national training often indicates that generating gender sensitive curriculum and materials is, indeed, an uphill struggle. Without proper guidance and deliberate and timely intervention, the products would have concentrated on the role of women as mothers and wives. A remedial re-orientation is often necessary to make up for omissions on other roles.

Informal reports from participants indicate the degree of their involvement in disseminating or multiplying the product of a workshop. PROAP communicates with individuals that have had regional training to check if they play an optimal role at the national level and if any support from PROAP could enhance their output.

Multiplying Effects

Educate to Empower assumes that each participant in a regional workshop is to organize a similar workshop in their respective country. The role of the latter is to educate new groups and develop better books focused on women's empowerment.

Thus far, at least two workshops have been held in each participating country. Some have had enough resources and stamina to organize up to five workshops. At the national level, training had to be adapted to suit specific requirements.

China concentrates on a handful of skills, among them pig-raising, conservation of oranges, mushroom culture and installing heating systems. They are making plans to cover other areas considered necessary for women, such as heating and plumbing.

Bhutan, with no previous experience in non-formal education, organized two national workshops to cover a host of topics from family planning and sharing of housework responsibilities to health and agricultural technology.

Bangladesh has conducted an operational workshop to adjust existing curriculum and materials to cover empowerment.

The manual, *Educate to Empower*, which documents goals, objectives, learning activities, time and materials required, is now being translated into national languages for use as training guidelines.

Lessons Learned

Training which seeks to change long-held attitudes requires enormous sensitivity and care. A supportive climate must exist to open minds to alternative ways of thinking and make them more receptive to change.

Methods seeking attitudinal change have to be participatory and non-threatening. A built-in component should provide a setting of safety and tolerance in which participants could intelligently question their own attitudes, values and beliefs.

A thorough analysis of needs must precede the get-together phase so that the product addresses priority concerns. Work skills alone do not empower women. Programmes for self-reliance have to include confidence building and other survival skills, such as communication, management and problem-solving.

To integrate work skills, developers have to draw on the latest expertise in relevant fields. To be accurate and fruitful, programmes based on rice-planting, for example, should take adequate advice from agricultural specialists.

Training programmes are better received as a package of vocational skills, reading and writing, gender orientation, and leadership training.

Numeracy and literacy must be integrated into functional contents in meaningful ways.

Extra-curricular activities fostering group solidarity are as necessary as the technical component. This takes a great deal of planning and active involvement of the group. While women enjoy priority as workshop leaders in this area, male participants with positive background and experience are very helpful in effecting a change in gender attitudes both in women and men.

The key to success in this type of training is participation. Active involvement makes the group feel the programme is their "own" creation and strengthens commitment when reproducing the workshop at the national or sub-national levels.

Empowering women and raising their status requires more than changes in women alone. The same has to happen to men's attitudes and behavior. This is why materials produced should reach both men and women audiences.

Discrepancies persist between the level of participants' background and experience. Trainers need to draw on the positive potential of this reality. Strong, advanced participants could be coaches for those who need help. Resource persons need to be particularly responsive to participants' individual needs and problems.

Discussion

Contents Selection

Experience in implementing *Educate to Empower* and in assessing educational materials leads to two important conclusions.

1. Self-reliance is undoubtedly a *necessary condition* for emancipation. Yet, it is by no means the only one, and certainly not a *sufficient* condition. Millions of poor, discriminated and marginalized women, throughout the world, live in highly unfavorable socio-economic and cultural conditions. They can survive and help their households do the same because they are already highly self-reliant. Yet, they remain victimized as far as human rights are concerned.
2. Competence in staying self-sufficient turns into proficiency when there is a will for action on the part of the learners.

The presentation technique is frequently used in a story/case history format. The stories often show a woman or woman overcome a problem, leading to an improved position. However, a very large number of such materials skim glibly over the most difficult events in the story. These are the parts which have a critical, positive impact on the woman succeeding. Such glossing-over leaves the reader with no competencies, and certainly no proficiencies, to replicate the event in her life.

An increasing volume of materials on women's education has become available in the region. Particularly since the 1980s, attempts have been made to analyze materials specially designed for women (UNESCO 1990, 1992).

More often than not, the materials, two-dimensionally presented, by themselves, are too static to bring about changes in readers'self-concept. Without carefully planned activities to complement the reading materials, e.g., guided discussion, games, shows, role-play and simulation, and under circumstances of extensive and rigid discrimination against women, the story could easily take the aura of myths-entertaining yet impossible to believe.

The following is an excerpt from an actual booklet written for women. It demonstrates shortfalls of such static materials.

> "...She expressed to her uncle and auntie her keenness to learn how to read and write. Her uncle Jagat *promised* to help her. He therefore approached the village panchayat to start a functional literacy class for women. He was informed that in order to start a functional literacy class, a proper accommodation for a Women's Center was needed, and 15-20 women and girls should be willing to join the Center. It was a difficult task to *convince* the other women to join the Center. However, *with the active support* of the village people, within a year, a functional literacy class was started."

The above is typical of the glossing over of the most difficult operations, such as those italicized. The uncle readily agreed! The other women were easily convinced to join the center! The village people were forthcoming! What exactly had to occur to make this happen? Surely that is of first importance for success!

Other examples are:

She *communicated* the idea to the women's club. (How?)
With *active support* of the women, she formed a club. (How was the active support produced?)
He *convinced* the village head that literacy classes should be started. (How?)
The *idea was accepted* . (What made them accept?)
Women appreciated her decision. (What made them appreciate it and not castigate her?)
Beenu *convinced* her mother-in-law that a boy or a girl is of equal significance. (How?)

Left with no answers to the magic "how", the readers or learners would hardly achieve competence in replicating the "story" in their lives. The events described remain hard to believe or enact in the disadvantaged scenario of a victimized woman. Fantasies do not raise self-respect. Quite the contrary!

At times, the stories indicate the formation of women's groups for action - a realistic alternative to the very rare event of a woman going it alone. But how does a group function effectively? Again a number of competencies and proficiencies are required. Also, is the "learning" or empowerment only in "storage" competencies, with none of the range of proficiencies needed to take action to remedy the disadvantaged situation of women?

Is it that the learning for empowerment only produces pent-up competence, and no proficiency is necessary to correct the situation of women?

If current materials do indeed provide for some awareness raising, then the next development of learning events, and materials to support it, may focus squarely on *action*, to enhance self-reliance and emancipation. In other words, empowerment has to bring about actions to correct disempowering conditions.

Clearly, the two-dimensional, static reading materials do not suffice to raise women's awareness on gender issues. Other materials and activities will need to be carefully designated to complement the materials. The materials themselves could serve as a starting point for debates, discussions, role-playing, etc.

Questions related to this will include:

1. What important information gaps need to be filled for each important topic?

Example:

What laws regulate workers' rights to paid holidays? Have there been workers who insist on these rights? How did they do it? If they failed, what are the obstructing factors? If they demand paid holidays, what would be the employer's possible reaction? What conditions are necessary for success in obtaining paid holidays?

2. Once the information gaps are identified, how can learning activities be designed to ensure that learners will want to take actions to improve the situation, i.e., to demand their rights?

3. What works best in presenting information? Should the teacher deliver the same knowledge repeatedly to reinforce the effect? Should she use the same methods to present the same information? Or is a single presentation sufficient? What is the general practice now?

4. What are other materials to strengthen existing materials, e.g., audio-visuals, etc.?

Training Techniques

People teach as they are taught. If participants are expected to train others to empower women learners, they first have to empower themselves. Training must therefore involve them in ways that enhance confidence in further training.

Training programmes have applied the following:

- group discussion
- question and answer

- songs and games
- creative work (e.g., songs and dances, drawing, story and poem writing)
- short talks, presentations
- individual work and coaching
- case study
- analysis of sample materials
- preparation of actual materials/curriculum.

Eighty per cent of the time goes to activities other than lectures or talks by resource persons as these are too trainer-centered. Evaluation indicates that participants enjoy activities that they describe as innovative. Nevertheless, better updates on training methodology are necessary to increase overall effectiveness in future training.

Questions related to training of trainers or adult educators will include:

- What are existing training methods and practices, their strengths and weaknesses?
- How effective are various methods tailored to training on sensitive subjects such as gender issues?
- How could innovative approaches be used to enhance the effectiveness of training?
- Do current methods enhance women's status? How?
- How to ensure that the best methods enter general practice? What methods work best with experienced teachers? And novices?

Empowerment and Policy Makers

The term empowerment has been a nonstarter in Asia and the Pacific. Many so-called traditional societies have been vehemently negative towards any programmes or projects claiming to focus on the empowerment approach (Ramachandran 1985). The term is interpreted to have militant overtones akin to "pitting women against men". It has evoked a great deal of antagonistic feelings among policy makers seeing this as a threat to the stability of the family institution or even the human race.

Somewhere, somehow, something went wrong. Policy makers, most of whom are men, have distanced themselves from even considering the concept. Their assumption: there cannot be empowerment of women without disempowerment of men. Some have explicity expressed concerns over men's potential loss of "control" over their wives and daughters. Others fear, genuinely, that they will not be able to respond to new demands arising from empowerment education.

Even when policy makers - indeed men in general, are supportive of the empowerment concept, their support remains largely intellectual. They do not deem it necessary to insist on actions leading to positive changes. This may be compared to what happens in many domestic situations. The husband recognizes that strictures on women are unfair. He cannot, however, give up any of the foothold he has acquired in his job or any of his pay in order to share responsibility for the children.

The question facing policy makers, with traditional values regarding the roles of women and men in society, is whether such changes are desirable and worthy of support. Thus far, advocates of Education for Empowerment have failed to convince policy makers to see the value of embracing women's empowerment as one of the necessary prerequisites for advancing society. Arguably, when one examines the situation of women's education in Asia and the Pacific, it could be said that no country in the region has made substantial progress in promoting women's empowerment.

One thing is clear, empowerment education will not make a difference in women's status on a large scale without supportive political will. Pockets of successful projects will not suffice to build a critical mass of empowered women (and enlightened men) to sustain any positive changes. Winning the support of policy makers is therefore a sine-qua-non for empowerment education if the latter is to help promote women's advancement in society.

The question is: what types of arguments can one use to gain policy makers's support?

Elson (*Depthnews* 1992) is doubtful about the wisdom of the prevalent practice of the attempt to fit the women's agenda into the overall development process. She argues that "...although women in development programmes have elements of empowerment, they are based more on the "static" rather than the "dynamic" concept of power."

Miller (1992) asserts that basing arguments on the male/female dichotomy is non-productive. Instead, she proposes that the discussion considers the new term of the "human community".

Clearly, enough groundwork must be done to establish forceful and reasonable (if not non-threatening) arguments. This is necessary before negotiation begins.

Some questions related to these issues are:

- What are effective and convincing arguments in favour of empowerment?
- Are there special programmes for advocating acceptance of empowerment?
- Does advocacy focus exclusively on policy makers or does it cover wider audience?
- Is lobbying necessary? At what intervals should it be done?
- What are effective advocacy methods, media, materials, manner and approaches?
- In what areas of public policy has advocacy been successful in affecting changes? What lessons can be learned from them?

Conclusion

Training to prepare educational programmes for women's empowerment needs to integrate the four components: gender issues, work oriented activities, literacy and numeracy skills and principles of curriculum design. It is yet too early to discuss the impact of this training programme which could only be assessed in terms of how it influences changes at the national level. What is certain is that the seed of education for learners' empowerment has been sown. Clearly, many problem areas arise. Better understanding of these issues will help improve the effectiveness of the programme which will ultimately help promote women learners as "empowered" members of their society.

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THINKING ABOUT WOMEN AND LITERACY: SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE

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I am involved in the adult literacy field in Canada as a freelance worker. When I first began to think about the work I have done recently, to think about issues for women and education, I thought first of the projects that are with women only. I thought of the women's literacy group I used to run, the woman literacy learner I tutor working on reading and writing around her memories of the violence in her life, the research project I carried out with women with limited literacy skills in rural Maritime Canada, and the wide variety of workshops I have given on the issue of women and literacy.

I didn't think of the literacy work I do with mixed groups, on leadership, training and facilitation skills. I was struck by that and as I began to rethink, realized that there were many issues of "empowerment" in that work and that whether I work with women alone or in mixed groups, I work as a feminist aware of questions of gender and their intertwining with race, class, and ability.

I was also, as I sat down to write, far too late to do anything but sketch out some notes, and "borrow" from things I had written before, feeling guilty -- why hadn't I got to this before? Why had I gotten sick just when I had planned to do it? Of course it is a familiar story, women who are over-committed, not allowing enough time to take care of ourselves, expecting our bodies to continue on like machines even if we ignore them, and feeling guilty when we don't manage to do it all!

That reminded me that there was another theme in my life -- trying to learn how to do less and respect my needs as well as other people's. This too is about challenge and support and women's education and is a project I share with many women colleagues and friends. In these notes I shall look at some of these sites of women's education, exploring some key questions they raise for me as I think about women and the power to change society.

Women Working Together

In the women's group I led for several years there were usually about six women of diverse ethnicity, age, ability, experience and literacy level. I wrote, in a letter to feminist literacy workers, about a key issue from working with this group just after I finished working with them:

> "I have been struggling with many questions from my experience of working with that group. One of the most obvious has been the difficulty the group has had in listening to each other - in creating a safe place where they can all speak - far too often they don't feel heard. The women who had widely varied experience and were of different race, ability and age often seemed to find their difference more striking than any commonality of experience. Ablism and racism created many barriers - sometimes glaring, sometimes subtle - but always there. Some of the women in the group, perhaps because they were used to being devalued as "illiterates", seemed to look to me, the facilitator, for all their support rather than the other women in the group. They often ended up competing for my attention rather than being the "group" of supportive women which I had hoped to help form. They pushed the limits of my energies over and over again, leaving me always wondering what I did wrong - how could I help the group become more self-sufficient and better able to listen to and support each other."[1]

Thus my challenge became to find ways to help the women to learn to listen to each other, to value each other, and so to strengthen their valuing of themselves and their own words.

Working on Issues of Violence

At the same time I wrote about working on issues of violence:

> "A long while ago the women's group had a session where they talked about their childhoods and shared some of the horrendous stories of drudgery and hard work. I feel that it is really important that there are spaces for issues of violence to be spoken about, but I have often felt worried that the women sometimes don't want to speak in the group, but only to me alone, and wonder sometimes how to cope with such revelations. I am often scared that I won't react in the best way, I think too I have been ambivalent about my role, feeling that the learners should be speaking with a counsellor trained in how to deal with such issues. Also I so badly want to change the situation for the learner that my own helplessness is tough for me to deal with - I feel so inadequate that I can not rescue her. I also discovered that by listening to a learner's account that she had not told before, I stepped into an unknown area, where the relationship of trust that has been developing is precious, but also demanding, and far beyond the limits of the literacy interaction."[2]

Since then I have continued to tutor and have gone through many highs and lows as I tried to learn how to support this student but not rescue her, to encourage her to take up her own challenges rather than to lean on me. I have had to learn to set limits and support her in keeping them. I have had to become clear about the limits of my role, my responsibility and my time and avoid being drawn in to providing support that was beyond what I felt comfortable with. I too have had to take on the challenge to explore my own difficult childhood memories. Together we have learnt to develop a new form of relationship between tutor and student, respectful of both our needs.

This tutoring, though it often seems immensely difficult, has also been the most exciting literacy learning I have seen. I have often spoken about the value of literacy as allowing a person to read about the experience of others and write about her own experience, so finding the commonality of her own situation and distancing from her own experience to consider her own experience more fully. But I have never seen the value of this so powerfully as in tutoring focusing on experience of violence and abuse which have been hidden as a shameful secret. In community-based programmes in Toronto, most workers are adamant that we cannot work with issues of abuse because it is too difficult and too specialized an area. We are not therapists, I am often told, and should not be dabbling, and yet how can we separate literacy from this very crucial experience of so many women's lives, without denying women the "empowering " possibilities of literacy?

I feel that working in an individual tutoring situation has been invaluable for this woman who had never told anyone about the sexual, physical and mental abuse of her childhood. It has helped her build her sense of herself as someone who has a right to demand respect and she has become a vocal spokesperson for learners' rights. But I would prefer to move towards addressing these questions in a group, where women can break the isolation and find common ground. I have been exploring the possibilities of running a women's writing group jointly with a therapist from a community health centre. Neither the literacy programme nor the health centre saw this as a priority and we have not yet been able to find funds.

In Toronto, the field of work on issues of violence and literacy have remained extremely separate. I would like to explore a variety of ways of working collaboratively with women who have been abused, for example, with women working as counsellors in women's shelters, or feminist therapists, so that we can learn from their experience on

how to deal sensitively, not only with the issues, but also with the relationships which develop. This could mean anything from talking with these women, to holding workshops on issues such as 'women and violence' or 'boundaries between women counselling and women being counselled', to rethinking and reorganizing the ways and places that literacy happens.

Asking Questions About Women's Lives

During the research I carried out with women in rural, Maritime Canada, I explored the promise of literacy programmes. A link between violence and literacy became a powerful theme. In 1990 I wrote about the study:

> "Women's dependence on men, on inadequately paid work and on social service assistance is threaded through the lives of many of the women I interviewed. This dependence leads to violence: the violence of women's isolation in the household and sometimes actual physical violence; the violence of the drudgery of inadequately paid, hard, monotonous jobs; the violence of living on an inadequate welfare income and enduring the humiliation of receiving assistance. Some of the violence is spoken of and shared, but much is endured in the silence and isolation of the home.

The illusion that illiteracy creates women's problems obscures the violence of many women's lives. Our attention is focused, not on the way women's lives are organized, or disorganized, but on women's failure to become literate. These women's lives are the context in which they experience the "promise" of literacy, and dream of how different their lives will be when they improve their education level. Yet for these women there is little chance that this promise will be fulfilled, particularly through many of the training programmes women are offered, which serve instead to embed them more firmly in their current lives".

I concluded the paper:

"Many of the women interviewed spoke about the importance of the challenge of an educational programme and the search for meaning in their lives, they wanted something in their minds "besides the everyday". Where programmes create space for the discussion of issues and for questioning the meaning of literacy, this can lead to exploring the unproblematic connection between education and "getting ahead". In this way the nature of the challenge of literacy can be broadened and the possibilities of social change strengthened."[3]

The importance of not simply offering women access to literacy for the sake of their children, and of helping them to do their traditional role better, is striking in Canada, as funding for women's programming is increasingly framed around "family literacy", as if literacy for women can only be justified for the sake of the children. Literacy workers are, I think, also frequently caught in the bind of wanting to justify the importance of funding for literacy programming and so inflating the promise of literacy, although workers know that for real change to happen literacy is not enough, much more needs to change in many women's lives. We do not want to destroy learners' dreams and hopes, but if women are to gain real power through literacy we must offer programmes which assist learners in understanding society rather than offering false promises.

Working on Women and Literacy

Workshops with women literacy workers under the title "women and literacy" are a place where we can explore what we are offering women learners in current literacy programmes. It has become almost obligatory at conferences and trainings to add in one session on women! Over the last few years I think my workshops on this topic have

changed gradually from an emphasis simply on the needs of women learners to much more focus on the common ground and differences between women learners and workers (and of course I have been pressuring for moving away from adding women in as one session, asking whether all the rest of the curriculum is about men?). I have also begun to explore questions of feminism and literacy with broader audiences, focusing on the questions of why literacy is a feminist issue and why feminism is a literacy issue.

In one workshop women talked a lot about the conditions of their own work and the lack of "safe" places to reflect on their work with women with other women who shared some understanding. Women spoke of knowing that they must hide their feminism and sometimes also their sexual orientation for the sake of avoiding confrontation in their workplaces. One participant in this workshop said:

> "I am discouraged by the state of the social/economic context in which we work - as women, as feminists. How can we support poor women, ethnic women, ourselves as practitioners in the political scene in British Columbia? Lots of anger and frustration surfaced during this 'safe' workshop."[4]

The crucial question on how far you can support others in gaining power when your own power is limited, was raised. By the end of this conference women had decided to try to form a feminist literacy workers' network to create more safe places to discuss and develop our understanding and our practice. The Feminist Literacy Workers Network has since created a system of "wandering books" which people write in and pass on, and held one conference. Both these developments have been exciting, though perhaps not surprisingly, the conference did not always feel 'safe' to all women as there was much difference about whether everyone could identify with the concept of feminism or whether some people were comfortable with others' discussion about heterosexism and homophobia. The network continues, though we struggle to find the time to carry out the work needed, wanting the organization to become a place of communication where we can challenge and support each other, not become one more burden.

Training Literacy Workers

The training of literacy workers is another place for us to question our current practice in literacy programming in Toronto. Too often we design creative, innovative educational approaches for the women we work with, but ourselves participate in traditional hierarchical educational processes which can be extremely silencing and disempowering. This training course was shaped around a vision of bringing a wide variety of people together to learn from each other and look critically at our literacy work to build a stronger movement. The particpants included paid workers, volunteers and adult learners, with a wide range of educational backgrounds. As the course progressed it became clear that exploring difference was one focus of the course. I sought throughout the process to create an environment of support and challenge for all participants. Before the course began the vision was described:

> "After all the research was completed we generated a vision for the course we were trying to create, building on the directions we were given in combination with our own beliefs. Our goal became to create an innovative experiment in participatory education. We wanted a wide variety of people in the course who would learn from each other, from readings and from reflecting on their own experience. We wanted the course to strengthen and build the literacy movement, not simply build individual careers. We wanted to create an educational experience which could not be labelled as community college level, undergraduate, graduate or anything else. We wanted everyone to bring their knowledge, skills, experience and attitudes to the class

ready to examine them critically and consider new ideas and possibilities. We hoped people would be challenged by each other, by new material from readings, tapes and lectures, and by the processes they engaged in in the course. We hoped this challenge would lead them to develop their own thinking and increase their own knowledge and skills. We wanted to build a supportive environment where people would feel able to question their own beliefs and their own practices. We hoped people would take their learning in the course back to their programmes to enrich the work that is carried on there. We believed that the projects could lead to workshops, articles, radio programmes, manuals and bibliographies which would provide sources for others in the literacy movement to share in the learning. We decided to offer a certificate which described the course and indicated the amount of work required to complete it and we would ask each participant to write their own statement for the certificate so that it would be clear that each person had taken on their own challenge.

We were eager for people of different backgrounds to work together in this course. We set the following criteria to make it clear who was eligible:

- you have experience in literacy as a paid worker, a volunteer or a learner;
- you want to stay involved in literacy while you are in the course;
- you have a way to contribute to the literacy movement; and
- you are prepared to question the ways we do literacy work and the ways we think about literacy."

We saw it as a central focus of the course to create a community which valued difference. We wanted to acknowledge differences amongst the group and encourage people to read or listen to different types of material as preparation, and to draw on and value all their varieties of experience. We wanted to break down the barriers often experienced when we assume differences based on our labels. We were trying to move away from categories of difference commonly used such as learner/ tutor/graduate/dropout. We wanted to acknowledge differences of experience, skills, knowledge and approach in the class and work to avoid seeing these differences as hierarchical. We did not want to see being a learner as offering the truth about literacy or having, as one learner put it, "those big papers" as offering the truth. We had to be aware of the way these differences, and the usual prejudices in society, sometimes create barriers to good communication. Our aim in this course was to challenge the categories of difference that we usually live by and to create a situation where we would all learn to listen better and learn from the rich diversity of people in the course, which would be a " springboard for creative change within our lives" (as Audre Lorde puts it).[5] We wanted to create a climate of trust and respect where people would not assume that the usual labels told us all we need to know about a person, where we would all learn from those we do not usually look to as teachers. We did not want a group that all shared one approach. We hoped we would learn from our different viewpoints and our contrasts.

The traditional education system operates through continual streaming, though sometimes it is quite hidden. At all levels the system suggests it is possible to label one person as smarter than another, one as more advanced than another, one as having more knowledge and so able to teach one with less knowledge and so only able to learn. Traditional education ignores the fact that we all come into an educational process with different skills, experience and knowledge and it judges us only on whether we leave with the same knowledge. The many people in literacy programmes demonstrate that the hierarchical system (the way of working that says we can know who is better than another, and label everything and everybody in grades) in schooling doesn't work, or works only to tell some people that they are clever, successful, important, while it tells others that they are stupid, can not learn, have nothing to offer. In this course we wanted to demonstrate that something other than this

traditional education based on so many labels and levels was possible, that we could invent new creative ways of learning together. I wanted to help everyone to take on their own challenges and to go away having learnt from the processes, the content, and many of the individuals in the course.[6]

In the course we sought to challenge the traditional hierarchical notions of education and to create a microcosm of a society which did not label or categorize according to hierarchies, but which also valued our differences. It was clear during the course that many of the prevalent hierarchies and prejudices in society were still operating. I would not want to suggest that we can break them down simply through individual change. But we were able to create an environment with sufficient trust to begin to explore difference and the meaning of privilege and oppression and the categories of class/gender/race/ethnicity/ ability as well as the categories particular to the literacy movement of learner/tutor/paid worker. In this way, though we were not focusing solely on gender in this course, we were participating in a vision for a form of education which would offer challenge and support for all participants, rather than building educational privilege and strengthening inequalities.

Creating Limits

Lastly I had wanted to speak about the importance for women educators to consider our own needs and set our limits in such a way that we are not always overstretched, but to do that I would stretch my own limits! So I will end saying that when we think of women, power and empowerment we cannot afford to ignore ourselves and the model we are offering the women we work with.

In all these sites of women's education I have been exploring I would argue that we need to assess critically the detailed practice of both our literacy teaching and our teacher training. We need to reassess how to acknowledge and work with women's experience of violence within the field of literacy teaching. We must consider the value of all of this work in enabling us to envision and move towards a changed, egalitarian society.

Notes

1. *This was written for "Wandering Book", a project of the Feminist Literacy Workers Network. Wandering books are sent from woman to woman in the network and we each add an open letter to other women in the network. They move slowly round the network and two years later I am still waiting for the book I started to return to me!*

2. *This was also part of my Wandering Book entry.*

3. *From the problem of illiteracy and the promise of literacy, in Hamilton, M., Barton, D. & Ivanic R. (eds.) Worlds of Literacy. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 1992.*

4. *Workshop participant's comment from Talking about lives: Planning Programs for Women, in Literacy 2000, Make the next ten years matter. Conference Summary, ed. Bossort, Patty et al. New Westminster: Douglas College, 1990.*

5. *In "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" in Sister Outsider, Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984.*

6. *From the curriculum package for Literacy Workers' Training Course: Building the Movement, Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy, Toronto, Canada, forthcoming*

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